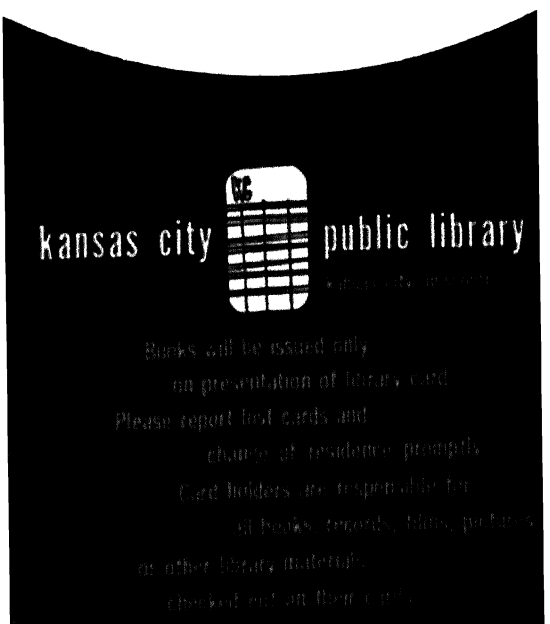
TEXT CUT BOOK

808.3 W588 (4) 946824
White
How to write for a living



3 1148 00291 5775

DATE DUE

MAY 20 1973

MAI JUL 3 1976

MAI AUG 16 1984

MAI APR 16 '88

MAI SEP 29 1989

MAI OCT 05 1989

MAI NOV 08 1990

MAL 01 2000

HOW TO WRITE FOR A LIVING

BY

Trentwell Mason White

REYNAL & HITCHCOCK

New York

For A. H. C.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A SMALL PART of the material in Unit One ("Creating the Short Story Pattern") has been freely adapted and expanded from the author's series, "Ten Points of the Fiction Pattern", which appeared in *The Writer* magazine during 1935 and 1936. This and the sections on the Love Story, the Juvenile Serial, and the Short Short Story—all by the author—have been edited and reprinted here by the special permission of the publishers of *The Writer*.

The following essays included in this book were made available also through the courtesy of *The Writer* and the permission of the authors: "Writing the Western Story" (Francis W. Hilton), "How I Write Sea Stories" (James B. Connolly), "On Writing for Children" (Elizabeth Coatsworth), "Why You Can't Write Dog Stories" (Albert Payson Terhune), "The Juvenile Field as a Training Ground" (Clayton H. Ernst), "If You Must Write for the Movies" (Doris F. Halman), "Editing the Manuscript" (Edward Weeks), "The Author's Second Trade" (Harford Powel, Jr.), "Are Editors People?" (Kenneth Payson Kempton), "Where Ignorance Is Bliss" (Frederick Orin Bartlett), and "Literary Discipline" (Alan Devoe).

Leonard Nason's "Doing the Adventure Story," Grace Morse's "Author-Agent-Publisher," and Alice Howard Spaulding's "The Play Script" were all done specifically for this book and full appreciation of these authors' generosity is hereby given.

For permission to excerpt and edit from their book *How To Write for Radio* the section retitled "The Radio Script" sincere thanks are due to Katharine Seymour and J. T. W. Martin.

—T. M. W.

PREFACE

THIS book has been built for two types of readers: the adult with an eagerness and the leisure to learn about the fundamentals of modern fiction construction in the business of writing for profit; and the college student whose advanced composition courses demand of him some knowledge of literary craftsmanship in one or another of the various forms of imaginative writing.

Frankly didactic and often arbitrary, the book sets up groups of "rules" which may be considered as patterns or formulas. These have been evolved out of no academic theory but from many years of professional writing, editing and teaching. To insure the broadest possible approach to this subject, a number of practical essays by certain distinctly "arrived" authors have been woven through the text. The backgrounds and reputations of these writers establish their authority in their individual fields. It is interesting to note, that as each author is presenting his own, very personal point of view, there are a few provocative contradictions both among the writers and with the author of the text.

But it is significant that while all may disagree on some of the angles of attack in auctorial mechanics, all are in complete unanimity that the intangibles concerned in truly creative authorship can never be taught, can never be learned from this or any other textbook or lecture.

—TRENTWELL MASON WHITE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

UNIT ONE

CREATING THE SHORT STORY PATTERN

I FIRST CONSIDERATIONS 21

II THE PLAN 38

III THE PLOT 49

IV CHARACTERIZATION AND OTHER PROBLEMS 75

UNIT TWO

CREATING TYPES OF THE SHORT STORY

INTRODUCTION 91

I THE ADVENTURE STORY 93

II THE LOVE STORY 100

III THE WESTERN STORY 106

IV THE DETECTIVE STORY 112

UNIT THREE

CREATING JUVENILE FICTION

I THE JUVENILE FIELD AS A TRAINING GROUND
Clayton Holt Ernst 123

II ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN
Elizabeth Coatsworth 130

III BUILDING THE JUVENILE SERIAL 136

UNIT FOUR

CREATING OTHER FICTION FORMS

I THE SHORT SHORT STORY 147
II THE NOVELETTE 154
III THE NOVEL 162

UNIT FIVE

CONSIDERING ASSOCIATED FICTION FORMS

I THE RADIO SCRIPT
Katharine Seymour and J. T. W. Martin 177
II THE PLAY SCRIPT, *Alice Howard Spaulding* 207
III IF YOU MUST WRITE FOR THE MOVIES
Doris F. Halman 217

UNIT SIX

REVISING, EDITING, PROOFREADING PROBLEMS

I REVISING THE MANUSCRIPT 225
II EDITING THE MANUSCRIPT, *Edward Weeks* 232
III PROOF AND PROOFREADING 236

UNIT SEVEN

SELLING: ATTITUDES AND ACTIVITIES

I ARE EDITORS PEOPLE?
Kenneth Payson Kempton 243
II THE AUTHOR'S SECOND TRADE
Harford Powel, Jr. 254
III AUTHOR—AGENT—PUBLISHER, *Grace Morse* 259

UNIT EIGHT

THE AUTHOR DISCUSSES HIS TRADE

I LITERARY DISCIPLINE, *Alan Devoe* 271

II WHERE IGNORANCE IS BLISS *Frederick Orin Bartlett* 276

III HOW I WRITE SEA STORIES, *James B. Connolly* 284

IV WHY YOU CAN'T WRITE DOG STORIES *Albert Payson Terhune* 292

V DOING THE ADVENTURE STORY *Leonard H. Nason* 300

VI WRITING THE WESTERN STORY *Francis W. Hilton* 305

UNIT NINE

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I BOOKS FOR STUDY 314

II BOOKS FOR READING 317

III BOOKS FOR REFERENCE 318

UNIT TEN

THE CONTRIBUTORS

I THE CONTRIBUTORS 321

INTRODUCTION

What Is a Fiction Writer?

EVERY commercial writer considers his work a business rather than an art. Thus the title question of this introduction is not concerned with the qualities required of a master of contemporary literature. It purposes to discuss certain of the basal characteristics of the average established writer who, by the standard and volume of his output, can properly be called a fiction craftsman. The question is also intended as a challenge to the reader; to urge him, through self-analysis, to find out whether he possesses the essential equipment with which to undertake the business of story-writing. The whole angle of attack, therefore, is commercial rather than literary.

1. The impulse to create is the heritage of every intelligent human being. It is seen in its purest form in the work of children up to the age of eight or ten. From that time on it becomes increasingly less observable until, in the adult, it seems to have disappeared almost completely. The growth of a social awareness is significantly coincident with a diminution of the creative urge. As the individual comes to recognize his responsibility to the community, he discovers that not the man but the mass dictates the common denominator of action. So, limited by the *mores* of society, he learns gradually to deny most of the expressions of his individuality and to accept the protective coloring of the group as a simpler guarantee of security. When his absorption into the community is complete, the destruction of his creative impulse is also complete.

Nevertheless, he who within himself refuses the restrictions of mass thinking and mass living, who will not be caged by conventions or regimentation, who sincerely believes that his "purpose holds to sail beyond the sunset," can retain the true creative spirit. Because he has the courage, the rebelliousness, the self-faith to stand against the mob and build something genuinely his own, he can, if he is a writer, produce literature. But that is not enough. While he is emancipating himself from the mob, he must learn also to satisfy it. Hence there are two steps to successful commercial writing, and those who would reach the second, or commercial level, must first answer the question: *Have you the creative writer's temperament?*

2. Just how extensive a person's education must be for him to engage in the business of writing is a matter of opinion. Certainly no writer has ever had an adequate education however vast his formal academic training, however broad his acquaintance with the psychology of his fellow human beings. But one thing is, of course, clear: the more widely educated and experienced an author is, the more complete can be his mastery of thought and expression. A sound literary background means a bedrock foundation upon which to build either commercial or quality fiction. Nor should grammar and rhetoric as basal tools be scorned. These, with a perpetually expanding vocabulary and a nimble imagination, will yield precision, nuance, flavor, vigor, color and life to any fiction conception. The exact word, the delicate meaning, the fragrant phrase, the realistic scene—all these belong to the writer who out of his education can command his language and so create by it a vehicle for his experiences real and imagined. *Have you the basis of a fiction writer's education?*

3. No fiction writer who lacks a permanent curiosity about himself, his fellow beings, and the forces which are at work upon life ever succeeds in interesting anyone in his creations. The good author constantly "exposes himself to opportunity"—the opportunity to discover everything he can about the individual and the group, about success and failure, love and hatred, inertia and ambition, strength and weakness, and the thousand other details which make up the designs of living. Sensitive to these forces, the author learns to seek them out, to appraise them according to the shifting standards of his contemporary world, and, finally to set down this appraisal with understanding and in a manner which may both divert and instruct. *Have you a fiction writer's curiosity?*

4. Of all vocations authorship ranks among the first in demanding that its members possess a maturely developed sense of humor. Every fiction piece reveals the author's own personal sense of proportion, his ability to see himself and others in a realistic relationship. It shows the flexibility of his imagination and his ability to interpret shrewdly an individual and a group point of view. A good story makes the reader believe that "life is like that," not that "that is like life." When an author's sense of humor functions properly, his narratives contain the elements of human psychology in a believable blend. The fiction master spins the wheel of life, and the new figures that result, be they simple or complex, are perfect in their symmetry, convincing in their humanness. Indubitably, this peculiar awareness, this delicate balance is an inherent not a learned response. But, even the most rudimentary beginnings can be somewhat stimulated by curiosity, by intelligent observation, and by analysis. An adult sense of

humor comes to evaluate the forces which move beneath man's superficial reactions to his routine existence. To say it another way, the author comes to see today and yesterday and tomorrow as a continuous tapestry which, held properly, catches the light and with its pattern and color attracts the onlooker to its significance. *Have you a fiction writer's sense of humor?*

5. Every professional author who turns out both quality and volume learns early in his career to follow both a physical and mental schedule. He does not write in fits and starts as the winds of inspiration blow him. He sets—and keeps to—a regular program which brings him to his desk at the same time every working day for approximately the same number of hours. By a trial-and-error method the writer usually discovers that, after careful planning, his first job is to hammer out his narrative, however crude its first draft, then, upon its completion, to revise it coldly as many times as his standards demand. The average layman's picture of an author's life is quite different from this. So far as the world is concerned, most writers are on perennial holiday entitled, "gathering material." Actually, there are few tasks so confining, so demanding of discipline as that of fiction creation, and no one should undertake it unless he is willing to undergo a regimen close to drudgery. *Can you impose upon yourself a fiction writer's discipline?*

6. An author does not succeed for long without a set of craftsman's standards. Honest writing means writing done not merely to meet the demands of the media through which the material will appear but also to satisfy a level of quality which the author knows represents his best work. Every true fiction craftsman's sense of integrity sharpens

with his years of experience. He hopes and tries to make each piece more closely approach the goal he has set; he wants today to do stories he can look back upon with pride twenty years later. In the trade of writing static standards mean depreciating literary values. Financial return does not determine artistic success however much it may indicate temporary public approval. Dissatisfaction with one's current creations is a healthy condition—it implies that growth is still in progress. *Have you a fiction writer's integrity?*

UNIT ONE

CREATING THE SHORT STORY PATTERN

I. FIRST CONSIDERATIONS

The Approach to Fiction Writing

LET these two points be clear from the start. No worth while writing of fiction or any other creative literary form is done by dilettantes. No one has ever succeeded in becoming an author merely by reading a book on techniques, by taking creative writing courses, or by belonging to one of the innumerable "literary" clubs which honeycomb our country. Worse than this, these very activities may seriously handicap a person not strong enough to resist the attitudes and conformities such forces develop. Professional fiction writing, like parturition, is essentially a solitary matter; and about it much of the advice must be negative. In both cases the multiplication of midwives and other interested persons tends to damage the sturdiest child as well as the mother.

The preface of this book announces that although the *art* of fiction writing cannot be taught, the *mechanics* of it can be. No one who plans to undertake a career of letters should neglect a study of these mechanics, based as they are upon a known and widely recognized scheme which all authors of conventional stories use consciously or intuitively in creating their yarns. Which is, of course, another way of stating that rather well-accepted fact that the machinery of the conventional or "popular" commercial story is built out of a pattern, a formula, or a fixed design. While most magazine editors will privately agree to the truth of this, publicly they weasel. Rejecting a yarn which does not fit their formula, they often say:

"This is [for instance] not a *Collier* story," or "This is not *McCall's* type of story." Writers are even less willing to admit the existence of a standard design; it seems to them to imply that their product is fundamentally commercial (which it is, of course, and what of it?) rather than literary. And there are very few authors who during their creative years do not have a secret yearning to turn out at least one really artistic piece. It is this urge which every now and then causes highly successful writers in *The Saturday Evening Post* class to slave over a story for *Atlantic* or *Harper's* (and for approximately one-tenth of the financial return) just to check up on their artistic capacities and literary standards.

This very attitude shows an important distinction between the popular narrative and the fiction piece of the "quality" publications. Yet, patently, the one is no better than the other since each is built specifically for its different audience. The conventional story is read weekly or monthly by some 26,000,000 persons while a scant half-million absorb the fiction of the literary magazines. Apparently, an author must choose (if by his talents he is given that choice) between a large literate—and a small literary—public, between commercial and artistic success, between temporary fame and a remote chance of immortality.

The person who determines to become a writer of popular short fiction should study carefully the peculiar characteristics of popular and quality audiences. A great gulf separates the two types of readers—the result of entirely different points of view in their personal philosophies. The quality reader will accept fragmentariness or formlessness because it challenges his imagination. He enjoys the

subtlety of elision, appreciating the chance to interpret for himself. He is realistic enough to accept either an unhappy story ending or an inconclusive one not because he considers such an outcome artistic, but because it seems inevitable. The reader of quality fiction is, in other words, willing to do some creative mental work for what he gets. The reader of the commercial story as it is published in the pulps and wide-circulation magazines is one who enjoys "easy" fiction. He wants nearly everything to be completely stated. He is interested in motivated action which leads to conclusiveness. He approves of thorough finality. He demands that the answer be given because he is in no mood to supply it. Thus he expects his stories to have "a point" and—a happy ending. Since his strength in numbers is some fifty times greater than that of his literary brother, he will, presumably, get what he is after and in a form which he can understand.*

* "The popular reader asks today that which he has always asked of his literary materials—stimulating communicability. He wants a story with a purpose which will leave him at its conclusion a slightly different person, one exalted or thrilled or simply entertained, but, at any rate, not quite the same person he was before. Such a story must, therefore, have an essential simplicity of plan to match such a demand and such a reader. The majority of the world of readers wants a *story*, not the ill-disguised technicalities of a psychiatric report. It is being said today that the average reader is increasingly less attracted by routine 'escape' fiction; that realism is becoming more popular. I doubt it. I have yet to see significant signs of it. I have yet to see that the modern popular story is *basically* different from that of a quarter of a century ago. Certainly the present pattern can readily be proved to be but slightly changed. True, some minor modifications have occurred to make for flexibility in the framework, to make the bones yield more readily to the changing attitudes of a changing existence. But the framework, nonetheless, continues its original articulation. . . .

"The unchanging formula-story which gives a temporary or lasting feel of satisfaction, of happiness to 26,000,000 readers of popular fiction . . . certainly

This understandable story form is none other than that which is developed from a pattern scheme. It is, of course, frankly commercial, but, at the same time, it represents, when well done, a craftsmanlike job. Literary, and would-be literary persons, allude to it loftily as "machine-made," because it seems always to be built upon a well-defined design. Suppose it to be true; the craftsmanship involved in creating a commercial story still requires as much technical skill as does the literary piece.

Let us look at it. From the standpoint of analysis, the formula tale lends itself admirably to dissection. Its construction is comparatively uncomplex, and its fundamentals come well inside the conscious experience of the average adult reader and writer. I have said that this yarn was based on a demand for conclusiveness, for satisfactory finality, for a "happy ending." Because of this purposeful aim I shall hereafter refer to it as the story of "objective development." A study of its elements will show how it lends itself to a design, and how, once well designed, its wheels spin 'round so efficiently and intriguingly that the reading interests of millions are captured and retained.

Not so long ago I received a postal card mailed from some tiny hamlet in Maine. It was very grimy and addressed in a crabbed hand. The message scrawled upon it

has a reason for existing, and must be considered. It has, for all the dishonest writing that sometimes creeps into it, some literary value in that it is encouraging millions to keep on reading, to keep on trying. Maybe it has many misguided and misguiding ideas, but it still sticks to the fundamentally human thought that self-improvement is worth while, despite our experiences of the present century." From an article by the author, "What Is *Not* Happening to the Short Story." *The English Journal*, March, 1936.

was tortured and labored and ran, as I recall it, something like this:

> "My husband has been dead for nearly ten years. I have four children. I have been bedridden with paralysis for several years. A little while ago I read in some newspaper or magazine that you had a formula for writing stories. Because I cannot get out of bed, the only thing I can do is read or write. I need money. If you will write on a post card your story formula and send it to me, I will pay whatever you ask out of the first stories I sell.
>
> Very truly yours
> Mrs. L.————————"

Perhaps I comment on the obvious, but to the reader who may have the same idea as did my correspondent, I shall merely say this: it takes me the better part of the college year to outline the so-called "fiction pattern" to my classes in Cambridge. If it were possible for me to do it in shorter time, let alone condensing it into the limits of a postal card, or even a magazine article, I should be pleased. Even with the generous page allowance for this unit in *How to Write for a Living*, I can do little more than point out the major articulations in the skeletal design of the commercial story of objective development.

The Story of Objective Development

The objective story has, as its title indicates, the prime purpose of meeting a set objective. It is generally written from the third-person point of view (first person narratives are not favored by editorial offices). Beginning with an early statement or implication of its objective, it continues with action and conflict, finally to be resolved plausibly and with success for the central character. Its geography is limited only by the information or imagina-

tion of the author; its actors are (regrettably) often more types than persons; its incidents and scenes are built in close continuity, one unit overlapping the next in rapidly mounting succession; thus its pace is swift throughout; its ending is logical, completely conclusive, and, hence, entirely satisfactory.

The Real Starting Point

Many a novice starts his yarn with enthusiasm and interest: he has visualized an appealing character to put into what looks like a good situation. After finishing a half dozen or ten pages, he begins to sense something wrong. Painfully he hammers out a few more sheets, then finally convinces himself that the idea somehow is not large enough or is too large for the required length of his manuscript. At that point either he gives it up or arbitrarily tacks on an ending simply to conclude the narrative. Not realizing that *he had no real story at the outset*, he has taken a chance on one's unrolling itself as it went along; on its carrying him to some adequate—though unselected—objective. *Because he began at the beginning rather than at the end, he failed to create a short story.* Few popular fiction authors, however long and successfully they have been writing, dare so to gamble on the conclusion of their yarns. Consciously or unconsciously, they know that from the first. They know when they start that the purpose of the narrative is to reach an objective. With that ending well established in their minds, they construct the tale to meet it; thus, in a sense, they always write the story backwards.

Two Parts to Objective Purpose

Every formula tale involves two problems of objective purpose—one, general, the other, specific. General pur-

pose will be found to lie beneath specific purpose and more or less looks after itself. It is controlled by intuitive or automatic taboos. Few authors attempting the objective tale are ever conscious of this broad purpose, although it must always exist. Nearly every author, however, must, for reasons previously mentioned, be conscious of specific objective purpose. An example of these two forces operating coincidentally in a story can be seen in the following outline of a fiction piece.*

The young son of British-American parents comes to live in the United States with his divorced father who has taken a job in New York. The East-side boys with whom he goes to school he admires at once and determines to have them accept him as a member of their "gang." His British accent and background prove a great barrier, and they think him a sissy. Whatever he does is either misunderstood or discounted. Finally, after a few fights and escapades, he is grudgingly taken into the comradeship he wishes but only on a kind of trial basis. Two of the boys he idolizes are presently suspected of stealing, and are put on probation by a judge. The day before these boys are to make their monthly report to the probation officer, they decide to run away. The English lad knows what this will mean if the boys are caught and he urges them to reconsider. They scoff at him and continue to lay their plans. Thus he finds himself in a desperate dilemma. Because of the code of the gang, to appeal to anyone else would be treason. On the other hand, he is unable to stop them himself. The more he reflects upon the situation, the more certain he is that if his friends persist in their purpose they eventually will be captured and sent to a reform school.

With a high fever from a cold, contracted only a few days before, he leaves his sick-bed to go out in a rainstorm to plead with the boys as they reach the end of the town. They turn deaf ears to him, and try to thumb a ride in a passing car. The English boy, distraught, resolves to go with them, hoping to dissuade them before they have gone far.

* *The Devil Is a Sissy*, an MGM production starring Freddie Bartholomew.

The trio is picked up by a carload of fleeing hoodlums who use the boys as a front to pass through a police net. The criminals, learning from one of the boys that their English companion has a wealthy mother, plan to kidnap the youth and hold him for ransom. They stop at a lunch cart run by a French-Canadian, and there the English boy, who has discovered that both he and his pals are in danger, talks French to the proprietor and explains the situation. The man swiftly summons the police and the youngsters are rescued.

By that time the English boy's cold has developed into pneumonia because of rain and exposure. He is taken to a hospital where, in delirium, he still worries about the fate of his friends in their plans to escape probation. The youth reaches a crisis in his illness. His two friends, who now realize how much their comrade has done for them, come to his bedside and promise faithfully not only not to run away but, because of his gameness, to make him a permanent member of their "gang." This sudden attainment of his ambitions breaks his fever, and he passes the crisis successfully.

Sharply condensed though this story is (and depending on the detail of its development, it could be made into either a short or long fiction piece), it still contains enough of the essential narrative framework to show the functioning of the two types of purpose. The general objective can be stated as follows: to emphasize the truth that friendship is one of the most important urges among man's human relations. The specific purpose, of course, is to show how a certain boy faced hardships, danger, and even death to attain the comradeship and respect of his fellows.

The general objective purposes of fiction reveal how man reacts to the problems involved in the universal expressions or experiences of love, loyalty, honor, truth, revenge, perseverance, virtue, friendship, and so on.

Precisely how many general purposes are available for fiction no one can say with finality. Perhaps, as some persons insist, there are but seven. Others would double or treble the number.

Georges Polti, in his book *The Thirty-six Dramatic Situations*, suggests by the title the number of general purposes which he believes may motivate fiction. He subdivides these thirty-six into literally thousands of individual story possibilities each with its implied specific narrative objective. But whether there be seven or seventy-seven general story purposes, it should be clear that the number is definitely limited, and that every narrative, to have recognizable form and appeal, must use one of these great elements as a basis. However, it is the complexities of specific purpose that trip most beginners: in the succeeding pages any references to purpose or objective will, unless otherwise indicated, be aimed toward explaining the workings of "specific" purpose in fiction.

Selecting the Objective

The objectives available for fictional development are many and cover a wide area of human urges—important and trivial, noble and debased, practical and impossible. One of these purposes, *and only one*, must be selected by the author. His interest in it and in its story potentialities will determine its selection. It should be understood that this purpose, which the central character will have constantly as an objective, must be for that actor something to live by—however worthless or impractical it might be personally for the reader. Accumulating a paltry hundred dollars to avoid losing a miserable hovel by foreclosure means little to the casual observer, but to the occupant of the hovel the achieving of this purpose may save a home.

a world, a life. It is the way the character meets the challenge of his objective, not the objective itself, which gives the reader his major interest in the narrative.

But various taboos circumscribe the selecting of the objective. It must never, for instance, be downright impossible, or even implausible, it must not be stupidly trivial or altogether selfish. The reader prefers narrative purpose to be reasonable; to be admirable or somehow temporarily desirable; to be pleasant, or to be lightly amusing. And note this: once the objective of the story has been decided upon, it must remain immutable; change of direction wrecks a story as certainly as leaving the tracks wrecks a train. It brings confusion to the plan and plot, and has the effect of requiring the reader to watch a three-ring circus through a pinhole.

A primary rule, therefore, in the mechanics of short fiction writing is to set a satisfactory objective as the *raison d'être* of the yarn before anything else is planned for it. Naturally enough, most stories probably first come into an author's consciousness by the way of an isolated incident which is, however, striking enough to set his creative faculties into motion, to stimulate him into thinking in terms of a story. But, once that has been done, he must next ask himself whether this provocative incident can be developed to include an important and reasonable objective for the principal character. If it cannot, then he should realize that the idea is merely incidental and will never resolve itself into a full-length, conventional yarn.

Recognizing Story Material

Let us look at a few fiction ideas to see whether they are incidental or immediately basal as story material.

Suppose you were to come upon this item in your daily newspaper:

Harris K. Norton, business man of New York City, is planning to set out on an expedition to a little-known part of Australia where buried treasure is rumored to be hidden. The point of Norton's trip, however, is not to discover the treasure, but to track down the mysterious circumstances under which his two elder brothers disappeared while searching for the cache the previous year.

(This is the substance of an actual news piece which appeared not long ago in the papers.) Does this have the possibility of development into a happy-ending narrative? The answer clearly is yes. Here, with a central character and his motive already established, the objective is evident and the potential rewards—which are well worth while—are apparent. It can be made into an exciting adventure story (with or without a female character). It takes little imagination to foresee Norton unraveling the mystery, finding his brothers, and unearthing the treasure.

Examine the following—also a recent news item.

A certain contestant in a famous horse race of last season had announced before the race that he would win because he had to, and, despite all the odds against him, he managed a victory. He rode as if his life depended on it—which, singularly enough, was true. If he had lost, he would have been unable to afford an extremely expensive, necessary, and delicate operation to restore him to health and so permit him to continue in his vocation.

Again, we see the chance of story development in this piece. A character has been indicated, the circumstances fixed upon, and the purpose behind the objective—an important one—is stated.

Here is another story suggestion:

A Kentucky mountaineer's widow, who in all her life has never been more than fifteen miles from her home, is given an opportunity by a New York newspaper to visit the City. She is wined and dined at the Waldorf, shown the sights of the metropolis, and is temporarily re-created with new clothing and with expensive presents. For a week she lives what to her is a fantastic dream, and then is returned to her mountain ca bin.

This material is not complete enough for a short story, however much it suggests one. It is interesting, perhaps, as a newspaper yarn. It has character, color, incongruity, and appeal to the imagination. True, out of this moth-eaten "Lady-for-a-Day" or Cinderella theme many a short story has been done, but in each case some *valuable objective* was built into the incident to give it a significant motive or point. It can be seen, then, that the above story suggestion is at best merely a kind of springboard, an apparent starting place. The author must find a purpose for it or let it alone. Once he has uncovered a satisfactory objective, he can go back and create the yarn; he knows precisely what the goal is.

Now consider this.

For more than a decade the residents of a tiny hamlet in the Middle West have made a gala occasion out of the annual appearance of a ghost in one of the nearby hills. Early on the evening of December 17 they begin to assemble around the base of the hill, and, with picnic baskets and coffee pots, wait patiently until midnight when, according to reports, the ghost arrives, screams, waves its arms violently, and vanishes. Tradition has it that a half century ago a farmer murdered his wife and two children in this vicinity and disappeared. It is his ghost, they say, that returns yearly to visit the scene of the crime.

With a few of the details changed, the foregoing incident might be one of a thousand folk tales, and is, accordingly, not an adequate story idea. But it can always be a challenge to an author's imagination. Let us search out an objective. Suppose, for instance, that the villagers have seen something which looks like a ghost. Suppose this ghost is really flesh and blood and has a purpose beyond the mere scaring of the local yokelry. Suppose his appearance is merely a smoke screen to conceal some sort of nefarious operations which require at that particular time that the hamlet be emptied of most of its citizens. When the reason for this scheme has been worked out, the author has simultaneously supplied a worth while motive for the investigation of this situation by a character who will act as a hero—a G-man, a private detective, or simply a curious skeptic. But let me repeat: the incident regarding the alleged existence of a ghost is not in itself a sufficient excuse for an author to dash pell-mell to his typewriter. Do not be misled into thinking you have found a story just because a setting is atmospheric, or the background information interesting, or other colorful elements exciting. These things are but a prelude to creative adventure.

Thus, to repeat, the first test question which an author should put to his narrative germ is, "What motive, what purpose, what objective is or can be involved here?" Unless this question can be answered in terms of something essentially interesting because it is *significant* or *important* and can be given *plausible conclusiveness*, he must find something else upon which to build his yarn. Otherwise what seems to be a story germ will remain simply incidental.

Announcing the Objective

Through years of training, readers of short fiction have come to demand an announcement of the story objective very early in the piece. Time was when virtually every popular yarn stated its narrative purpose in the opening paragraph and in specific language, such as this: "Curtis Hapgood faced a problem and on its solution his whole future depended. At three o'clock the following afternoon he must have five hundred dollars. And in his pockets there jingled lonesomely together a quarter, a dime, and two pennies—his entire fortune at the moment."

Such a headlong rush to pose the problem came about by the insistence of readers that the author get to the point; that he eliminate the ancient, wandering pseudo-philosophic introduction which took in far too much territory for those who wished to read and understand a story while they were racing for a train. This type of abruptly stated objective is still employed now and then, but it is less popular than the implied declaration through the leisurely approach or "build-up" method. In this latter plan the declaration of story purpose is prefaced or concealed by interesting and pointed but incidental action. It is also sometimes effected through characterization which, by statement or implication, presently reveals the objective.

One practical rule to follow in this matter is for the author to announce the story purpose, either in so many words or by suggestion, some time before Page 6 of the manuscript has been reached. The reason for this should be obvious. Few readers of the popular short story have the patience to go on for very many pages without knowing whither they are bound. They are not interested in

the character simply for himself, or in a scene, however vigorous its action, or appealing its beauty; and even a well-involved situation, unless its point is evident, will hold them only momentarily. What they demand is a provocative actor standing out against a colorful background, who is moved into action by a drive which has a *clear, reasonable, and worth while objective.* This objective becomes the *interpreting element,* the communicating medium in the yarn. It gives meaning to the story, and this meaning guides the conventional reader in the degree of his appreciation.

Is There a Story Here?

Test your ability to recognize story germs by studying the following paragraphs. Could you build a 5,000 word yarn out of any one of them? Try it.

1. From pup and kittenhood, a dog and cat have grown up together in the same family. They are tremendously attached to each other and to their master, a small boy of six. One hot summer day the dog goes mad and sets upon the small boy. The cat, divided in her loyalties, finally decides in favor of her master, attacks the dog, drives him off successfully, but is fatally injured thereby. . . .

2. A myopic city official, sponsoring a bill which advocates a jail sentence for jay-walkers, is standing near a traffic officer on a busy street when he notices a woman starting to cross against a red light. He determines to make a test case of this person, and directed the officer to arrest her. But, before the policeman has reached her, she has been knocked down by a passing car. When the city official reaches her side, he discovers that she is his mother. . . .

3. A business man who is facing ruin through what he suspects to be the machinations of his partner determines in

desperation to kill the man. For weeks he plans the murder and believes he has tested every alibi and has left no holes in his case. When he goes to commit the crime, he finds that his partner has already been killed by a burglar. Since he has had no chance to arrange the actual murder as he wishes, the business man cannot use his alibis, and everything points toward his being the killer. . . .

4. A visitor to Chicago is held up one night on a dark street. He escapes from the footpads, who pursue him. Running willy-nilly through dim streets and alleys, he sees a light over the door of one of many crowded tenements. He rings the door bell, hoping that the appearance of the occupant will put the thugs to flight. The door is opened by someone who says, "Come in, we have been expecting you. . . ."

5. In the biggest game of the year, a football player who, when given the chance to score, ran the wrong way of the field accidentally, and so lost the championship for his school, transfers under an assumed name to another institution. He makes the team there, and does very well until through a change and substitution in athletic program, his new Alma Mater is scheduled to play the college from which he transferred. Just a few moments before the game starts, he learns that his former team-mates have recognized him. . . .

6. An advertising salesman for a large metropolitan agency is in love with the daughter of the president of the company. He devotes so much time to his romance that his sales fall off measurably, and he is told by the head of the concern that he will be discharged unless he secures a certain contract which his company has been trying to land for a long time. When he goes to the nearby city where the client is, he discovers that he must deal with a girl to whom he had been engaged the previou year. He had broken with this girl when his present fiancée appeared. . . .

7. A jealous suitor publicly threatens his rival with death for interfering in his romance. It is during the hunting season in a

village in Maine. A few days later a bullet-ridden body is found. It has been further mutilated by a fall off a cliff. It is identified as that of the man's rival. The girl knows that a tramp, who is of the general proportions of her suitor, had been seen recently in the neighborhood. She suspects the dead man is this tramp but cannot prove it, since the rival cannot be found. . . .

8. A young man makes the acquaintance of a girl by saving her from drowning. She falls in love with him. Not realizing that this has happened, the young man falls in love with and plans to marry another girl. The wedding plans he reveals to the first girl, indicating, however, that he does not dare even to propose marriage to the second girl until he is a business success. The unloved girl privately goes to and gives his closest friend enough money for him to finance the young man's business properly. She then disappears without leaving any address. By accident the young man discovers the situation, and finds out also that his friend is himself in such a desperate financial jam that he may already have used and lost the money. . . .

Numbers 1, 3, 4, 6, and 8 represent especially appealing and usually popular story-suggestions. Number 2 is pretty thin; number 5 has been overdone, and 7 is likely to result in a story prejudicial to the happiness of an admirable character. The theme of number 7 is better suited to longer fiction.

II. THE PLAN

THE word "plan" as it is used in this section is to mean preparation. Plan may be divided into five parts: (1) informational preparation, (2) recognition and appraisal of material, (3) determination of the narrative point of view, (4) the writing time, (5) editorial taboos, and the market.

1. It is the practice of nearly every beginning fictioneer who thinks he has something to say to try writing it out immediately, and this despite his being armed only with an *apparent* idea. For all good reasons, this is not enough. The paragraphs at the conclusion of Section I are not sufficiently strong fiction springboards for any novice to use for a running dive, and this even though some of them contain a real story, including actors, background, and objective. With this much, the tyro has made only a start. It may be days, or even months before he is ready to type Page 1 of his manuscript. One of the reasons successful writers succeed is that they are willing to undergo the drudgery of long preparation. Their willingness derives from their knowing that two purposes will thereby be accomplished.

a. Anachronisms and other "boners" will be avoided, and the yarn will be in its details satisfactory and convincing even to those readers who happen to be familiar with the technical materials of the story. For example, the layman should not attempt a story about an insurance adjuster unless he knows more about that particular vocation than do other laymen. Too many insurancemen readers will detect the author's misinformation or

lack of knowledge of the subject. Don't try a story which has as its locale an African farm, even though you know the meaning of and can use glibly such words as *trek*, *kraal*, or *kopje*. It is not enough to have passed hastily through Trafalgar Square if one is going to write a narrative with that as the principal background. Don't try to write aviation stories without having read a great deal about flying, and unless you have done some flying yourself. All this is not to say that it is impossible to write about something without knowing it first-hand. But unless the writer is going to do a story which has as its background and action-material something with which he is extremely familiar, either by reading or by direct contact, he should not undertake the project without considerable research; otherwise his story will become dreadfully thin. It may be sound from the standpoint of fiction construction, but the many little descriptive and expository touches with which a good author creates flavor, color, and plausibility will be missing. All of this is, of course, a familiar admonition, yet it cannot be too sharply emphasized. An author with any integrity, with any eagerness to maintain his readers' confidence, will spend all the time the job requires to secure the information demanded by his narrative.

b. The second purpose of informational preparation is for the author's own benefit during the writing process. Unless he knows a great deal about his subject, he will realize more and more as he tries to develop his story that he is having to eliminate incidents and scenes because he is unsure of his ground. He doesn't know whether a character could do certain things under certain circumstances. He must worry about anachronisms, improbabili-

ties, and a thousand and one tiny matters. These will harass him to the point of admitting his ignorance of even the most ordinary things. This situation will bring about a psychologic "block" to the creative impulse and the author will be forced to suspend work. Many a potentially fine yarn fails of creation because the author does not bother to get at facts which require time and patient research.

2. Linked with problems of informational preparation is the recognition and gathering of material. The successful fiction writer is essentially a keen, tireless observer. Always on the alert for possible stories, he is forever collecting scraps of things which may sometime be of value. A few authors laboriously keep a card index of bits of everyday occurrences and of more extraordinary details which they may meet in their daily routine. They clip items from newspapers and magazines; they set down catch-phrases or random facts; they itemize incidents during a stroll in the city or country; they fill their files with bulky memoranda, much of which they never use directly but which in one form or another may sometime complete a character, a scene, or even an entire narrative. But, whether the author carries a pad of paper or simply makes mental notes, he must perpetually be an information hound with a permanent curiosity. With a nose for news, the author will uncover many a narrative possibility.

Next, he must train himself to appraise the story germs he finds by learning to force his imagination to create rapidly, unconsciously, the outline of a plot around them. It is difficult to explain precisely how this is done, but just as the author learns to look for or build an objective, so he must teach himself how to construct rapidly the

skeleton of a few principal scenes when an apparent story germ teases him. In this manner he soon acquires the habit of intuitively testing, accepting, or discarding provocative material over which novices futilely spend so much time and misdirected thought.

3. One of the most important decisions an author must make in working out the plan of his story concerns his choosing of what is called "the point of view." There are two general angles of narration. They demand that the author write the yarn either as a *participating character* or as a kind of *non-participating special reporter.* If the author determines to assume the rôle of a character in the tale, he must tell the story from one of the following narrative positions.

a. *As the principal character.* This, of course, is the well-known first-person point of view. In this "I" form, the author becomes a character who explains precisely what has happened to him as the hero of the tale. It automatically limits his story information to what he himself as the actor knows, thinks, and does, and to what he can gather from news, observation, and speculation concerning the activities of the other characters with whom he must deal. In this kind of yarn the reader has the right to expect full knowledge of every idea and reaction, every plan and purpose of the chief actor. Beginning writers often err in this sort of story by "playing false" with the reader. Under the impression that they are building suspense, they hold out facts possessed by the character-narrator which the reader is privileged to have according to the rules of first-person story-telling. This point should be kept in mind in connection with all the phases of the "I" form discussion.

b. *As the character secondary only to the principal.* Here the author works again as an actor, but this time in a rôle secondary in importance to the lead. He will likely be closely associated with the activities of the hero or heroine, but never once may he steal the spotlight completely. This narrative angle, like the previous one, restricts the information the writer can make available to his reader. He can announce what is going on in his own—the actor-author's—mind, but he cannot know what the principal character is thinking or feeling. He can learn this only by being told it by the hero and by observation and surmise. But there is compensation to this angle of narration in that the character-author is free to leave his principal when and as he pleases and to go about collecting and using facts in a manner which is not practical, usually, for his chief. And in this way he can give the reader side-lights and comments on various of the incidents and do it with an impartiality otherwise impossible. This narrative angle is sometimes called the "Doctor Watson" point of view.

c. *As a distinctly minor character.* Here we find the author participating only slightly in the action. He is bound to tell his story more impersonally, and, as in the two previous cases, he finds that he is excluded from the minds of all other characters but his own—a grievous limitation, sometimes. But he does have some of the advantages of the actor-author in "b" and an increased freedom to range more widely, to gather more information, to introduce the reader to more characters, and to appraise values more accurately. Employing this narrative angle, the writer becomes a keen-minded, coöperative observer.

d. *As the raconteur of a story in which he has actually*

played no part. Here we discover the author, thinly disguised as a character story-teller, using his position and authority merely to get the yarn off to some sort of start. He repeats, with whatever appropriate comments and suggestions he pleases, a tale which he has come upon. There are numerous variations of this "story-in-a-frame," all of which, for some peculiar reason, are very popular with beginners. And amateurs practically always do a bad job of it. This *is* a difficult type of yarn to do well, because the reader must constantly be kept from realizing that he is being told a second- (or even third-) hand story, and the maintaining of interest under such an impediment demands of the writer more than ordinary deftness and narrative sense. The tyro is warned against attempting a tale from this angle until he is more mature in authorship.

The second general "angle of narration"—that of the so-called "omniscient author" or non-participating special reporter—is the well-known "third-person point of view." Stories written with this slant constitute about eighty-five per cent of all the fiction published outside the confession magazine group. This narrative angle has great flexibility and adaptability. It offers the author two choices of approach; he may tell the story from a completely objective standpoint in which he trails the chief character—and the others—to record all significant activities as they relate to the several elements of the yarn. This kind of narrative is seldom successful, because it can do no real interpreting of the characters and little more than a photographing, in motion picture form, of the action. The reason it is mentioned here is not only that it is sometimes utilized by skillful writers to gain graphic effects in motion, but that from it develops the best-

known narrative angle—the combination objective-subjective "omniscient author" point of view.

Here the author achieves the status and possibilities of the Creator—so far as his characters are concerned. He builds them, knows their every thought and deed, directs their action, determines their success or failure, kills them, or lets them live. In the short story, particularly, the author can announce to the reader what the central character is thinking, scheming, feeling, and doing. He, the author, can, if he pleases, peer into the minds of the other actors in the piece, but unless he is facile, he may by doing this so emphasize the importance of the other actors that the reader's attention will be distracted from the principal character. This, of course, weakens the interest in the major character; it transfers it thus accidentally to someone else, and so makes that unforgivable mistake—a change in the angle of narration. Let the writer drift in and out of the hero's mind as he wishes; let him detail every objective and subjective fact about this character and every *objective* fact about the rest; but let him not get so curious and eager about the minds of the actors other than the hero that he attempts to explain to the reader how these individuals' mentalities are functioning. Such a procedure instantly shifts the viewpoint and destroys the singleness of effect which—all pronouncements to the contrary—is still the keynote of brief fiction.

Since the third-person narrative angle yarn continues to be the most popular in every commercial magazine (except, among the confession publications), the inexperienced author will be more successful in selling his manuscripts if he sticks to this point of view. There are few

stories that cannot be done adequately—and usually better—from this angle.

4. By the expression "writing time" in the fiction-writing plan I mean merely this: when the author gets down to the actual job of writing a short story or a short short, he should have allotted well in advance a long enough work-period so that the yarn can be done, if possible, *at a single sitting*. Short stories "written-at" during random and indefinite moments nearly always show the patching. Unless the author has enough available time to begin and to finish his first draft uninterruptedly, he had better wait until he can provide the required time. Narrative unity is destroyed by haphazard attacks upon the tale; continuity falters; style is broken by the interruptions; inevitable changes in the author's mood, in the whole point of view of the story, may unconsciously shift and warp the main story-objective itself. Longer fiction may be hacked away at during odd intervals without showing the breaks too badly. It is seldom true of the briefer tale.

In the ideal situation the author, upon completing his plan, sits down and drives swiftly through the story, not pausing to edit or even to re-read until he reaches the end. The resulting copy will naturally be full of errors, omissions, and inconsistencies, but, since it has been composed in heat, its mood will be sustained; it will have, for all its crudities, the vital lift, the verve of a truly creative piece. Revision the next day or the next week may and should follow. Cutting, amplification, and polishing may be undertaken at odd moments and under almost any conditions. But, let me repeat, for the original composition, the creative time period must be generous and unbroken.

5. The final unit in the story plan takes into account editorial taboos and the market. Innumerable short stories have failed of acceptance because they either countered one or more of the particular "don'ts" of the editor, or because there simply was no market precisely suited to them. Each editor must consider, in addition to his own prejudices and peculiar interests, certain taboos characteristic of his magazine and, in part, of all other fiction media. These taboos may be fixed by publishers for personal reasons, but they are more likely to come from known reader-dislikes. It would be impossible to list the various magazines' taboos, but, in general, all popular publications refuse or only infrequently accept stories which contain the following:

a. Mention or plot-use of certain grave diseases, or the employing of a principal character malformed by accident or disease. True, there are numerous published examples to contradict this point, but nearly every editor would prefer manuscripts that avoid such taboos.

b. Themes involving political, racial, or religious discrimination or comparison.

c. Extensive profanity, vulgarity, smut, and the over-frank discussion or presentation of sex and sex problems.

d. Mistreatment, over-precociousness, serious injury, or death of children.

e. Subversive social propaganda and its associated activities.

f. The vicious lampooning, under poorly concealed aliases, of public characters.

g. Plots which take their impetus from natural cataclysms named as characteristic of certain localities in the United States and which might cause public-spirited

citizens of those areas to take offense. Instances are: earthquakes in California, tornadoes in Kansas, hurricanes in Florida, floods on the Mississippi. Great destructive forces have, of course, been used many times in fiction, but because magazine editors reflect the sensitiveness of the local inhabitants, authors should avoid pointing out too accurately the exact geographical spots of these calamities.

h. The attitude that certain social ills and problems are sectional characteristics. Examples of this would be plots dealing with the illiteracy of the South, the gangsterism of Chicago, the *nouveau riche*-ness of the Southwest, the stupid insularity of back-country hamlets in New England.

i. Plots which depend for their strength upon the principal character's undergoing deterioration or degeneration through alcohol, narcotics, or insanity. Great suffering, torture, or surgical operations are included also in this taboo.

j. The mention of commodities, either casually or as "stage props," where such mention may be construed as advertising. Interestingly enough, there has been a slow and cautious relaxation of editorial vigilance on this point. Every now and then fiction characters quite frankly wash with Ivory Soap, drive Buick automobiles, drink Coca-Cola, and shop at Macy's; but, for all obvious reasons, it is a dangerous practice for fiction authors to go very far in naming trade-marks.

The writer who wishes to sell his story will keep in mind these various taboos; then, if he is intending his yarn for a specific market (as he should), he ought to find out the "don'ts" of the magazine or general group of magazines for which he is writing. However excellent the story

may be, he will find it close to impossible to sell a yarn which includes one of the above-listed taboos.

Of markets, very little can be said here, save that every commercial fiction author usually has in mind, by the time he is ready to begin the actual writing of his story, just what general class of publishing medium he is aiming toward. He will know whether his yarn is right for the quality periodicals, the pulps, and "slicks," the confession group, or the juvenile publications. Market lists giving full information regarding the editorial demands of the nationally-circulated magazines are available in the various professional writers' journals.* No list can be kept up-to-date since the market requirements change so rapidly. It is up to the individual author, then, to keep abreast of his selling media, either by a regular monthly examination of the lists, by letters to the magazine editors, or by the advice of a reputable literary agent. Further discussion of problems of marketing will be found in later sections of this book.

* *The Writer, The Writer's Digest, The Author and Journalist, The Writer's Monthly, The Author's League Bulletin.*

III. THE PLOT

The Foundation Element

EVER since the appearance of the first fiction piece authors and critics have been busy defining plot. Their definitions have varied in length from a single word to books of hundreds of pages. The italicized sentence below is an attempt to arrive at a brief, working definition:

"*Plot is a literary mechanism composed of articulated dramatic elements (called scenes) which, when brought to bear upon a suitable objective, reveal a complete pattern of significant and progressive action.*"

It is, of course, impossible to discuss plot without some reference to characterization, but the major problems of characterization will be analyzed in the section immediately following this. Since the commercial story emphasizes plot as against characterization in a ratio of eight to one, the plotted narrative will receive almost exclusive attention hereafter in this text.

The foundation element of plot—the scene—is something like a living cell. As does the story, the scene has its separate objective; a beginning (problem), a middle (suspense), and an end (solution). It unites with other cells to form a significant body, and yet it does not lose its individual identity. Properly constructed, a scene cannot be removed from its parent story without weakening the physique of the whole narrative. The lifeblood of the yarn pulses through it to give growth to the cell and, in turn, to receive growth from it. In this cellular structure, every scene depends upon some previous and also later scene,

either implied or stated, and its purpose is to explain and change or attempt to change an existing situation. Meanwhile, it must never lose connection with the chief objective of the narrative, and it must function with a vitality equal in relative importance to that of all other scenes in the story. In other words, no story should contain any scene which can be classified as either isolated or weak. Such a scene must be linked and strengthened or dropped.

The action of a scene does not, of course, depend merely upon physical motion for its importance or interest. But some sort of mental or physical action must animate every scene if that unit is to advance the tale one dramatic step. Reader-interest in a scene is actually concerned less with its objective than with the character's overcoming of one or more obstacles or blocks to the attainment of that objective. The appearance of the obstacle makes for suspense, and this gives the scene and the entire narrative the promise of conflict or struggle which is the major challenge to the reader. The destruction or meeting of the obstacle lifts the reader to the next scene.

There is a perpetual argument among authors regarding the importance of setting down a rather detailed outline of scenes as a guide to the construction of a story. Some consider that it so freezes a narrative pattern, psychologically, before the actual story writing is begun, that the author does not dare or is not inclined to make necessary changes later. He fears he may destroy something inspired and fundamental to the plot-body. Others believe that an outline is required to discover what form the fiction piece is to take; whether it will turn out to be a short story, a novelette, or a novel. They argue that be-

yond this, the author has, through the outline medium, an opportunity to test the validity of each scene and its relationship to the rest; that in this way the objective of the whole narrative is kept constantly in sight. Such writers do not suggest that the scenes themselves be outlined with a full statement of their separate objectives and obstacles, but rather that each should be numbered (or lettered), named with its purpose, and briefly explained in a sentence or two.

Any sort of outlining may at first be a valuable guide for the beginning writer, but I doubt its practicality once the novice has learned how to forget plot as a mechanism and how to make its scheme function as a part of a subconscious process. I believe that it may be of help for the tyro to write out or to note briefly the major plot elements, then start the story. But he should know that every writer who really has a tale to tell can depend upon his interest in and information about the yarn to be enough to create many scenes almost automatically. Given any sort of directed channel through which to flow, the creative impulse will, by its very sweep, uncover much of the basal scene material.

The skeleton of a story, then, is made up of scene elements each of which is, in itself, a kind of tiny narrative. Composed of exposition, description, and/or dialogue, it is complete with its characters, setting, atmosphere, and objective. Each scene emerges from the one before and is knitted into the one that follows. When the pattern is finished, it will be found that the general story objective represents the sum of the individual scene objectives. Unless it meets this organization test, no story plot can be considered as complete.

Time Order and the Plot

From the standpoint of "time order" in story-telling, there are but three kinds of plots: the *chronological*, the *regressive*, and the *composite*. Of these three, the *chronological* is the most natural, the most easily understood, and the most readily created. It requires merely the slavish following of true time sequence in placing the incidents in the story; for instance, the exact sequence from six o'clock on Monday morning to midnight on the same day, or from Monday until the next Saturday, or from Monday on to the end of a fortnight. This chronological order seems to be made for the beginner, and he usually hits upon it early in his writing career. Since, as I have said, it is the natural order, why is it not satisfactory?

Well, because (1) the logical start of the tale, based on time sequence, may be without significance, dramatic value, or even important informational interest; (2) a chronological story body may be stuffed with incidents which either, because of their triviality, do not advance the yarn swiftly enough, or, because of their content or implications, demand an over-long explanation of prior action; (3) too much is involved of time, territory, or characters. In short, the chronological plot is often impractical for amateurs, because they have no experience to guide them in the finding, selection, and handling of the infinite variety of available incidental material. They are likely to chase the will-o'-the-wisp of interest into the miasmatic bogs of routine detail.

But the chronological plot is an excellent training ground for novices because of its practical directions regarding the collecting of material, the outlining and

testing of it, and the opportunity to learn something of the history of the story actors. To be used at first only for preliminary drafts, it is particularly worth studying, because it forms a solid basis for understanding the workings of the *regressive* and the *composite* plot.

The *regressive* plot uses its starting point as something not to move forward from but from which to retreat. To say it another way, the regressive plot begins at its conclusion and jumps back or works back to its beginning. This is less paradoxical than it sounds. You will, if you think over various stories you have read, recall a few which start at what is really their dramatic finish and then slowly or swiftly face about to pick up the reasons, motives, actions, and events that have made the announced conclusion inevitable. This method, strictly followed, is sometimes called the "total flashback."

It is apparent then that the regressive narrative may, in its psychological appeal, somewhat parallel the murder mystery in which the old millionaire is found dead in the library, and the first questions asked are, "Who did it?" "Why?" and "How?" The regressive plot explains at the beginning *what* has happened. Its suspense element lies in piquing the reader's curiosity to learn the circumstances which brought this about. The writer who wishes to use this kind of plot has four choices offered him.

1. The simple clipping-off of the conclusion and placing it just before the introduction, so that the scene order (assuming arbitrarily nine scenes in the tale) becomes 9–1–2–3–4– etc.

2. Once in a while, by the author's using a kind of O. Henry anticlimax which provides what may become an

extra scene, the order will be 9–1–2–3–4–5–6–7–8–(9) 10. (Here the repetition of scene 9 must be smartly condensed—little more than gestured toward.)

3. By starting the yarn at the scene which just precedes the dénouement, then going back to scene 1 and working straight through to the final outcome. The scene order then would be 8–1–2–3–4–5–6–7–(8)–9. (As in the preceding case, the repeated scene will be swiftly handled in a few sentences or, at most, a paragraph.)

4. An extraordinarily skillful writer will sometimes experiment with a fourth and the truest of the regressive methods. In this case his scenes, starting with the very last, will march straight back and in order to the first scene as; 9–8–7–6–5–4–3–2–1.

But if the *chronological* plot is treacherous because it offers the writer too much of an opportunity to wander about in the illimitable future (beginning as he does at a point in the present and working forward), so the *regressive* story trips many an author with a virtually endless past in which to flounder, mired by numberless incidents, characters, and real and imagined historical detail. Both the past and the future appear too uncharted for the young writer; he just can't stop (or sometimes can't begin) when nothing but the horizon shows him where he may go. The writer who determines to weave his yarn on the loom of either the chronological or the regressive plot machine must fix his story limits with more than ordinary care. He must sort and select his story and scene objectives with the warning of the dramatic unities nagging him like the voice of conscience: ***one time*** (and make it short!), ***one place*** (and keep it local!), ***one action*** (and

make it dynamic!). And in either of these plot forms such advice seems—and often is—impossible to follow.

Far better for the beginning writer is the "composite" plot which, as its title suggests, is a combination of the chronological and the regressive with the emphasis, however, on the former. An example—not of the plot but of the method—may picture this more graphically. A man, starting a mountain-climbing trip, announces the purpose of his going. We see him as he moves along with a pack strapped to his back. The place of his starting fades behind him swiftly; his goal beckons on ahead. As he goes, he looks back now and then, but he seldom pauses except to rest. During these breathing spaces which (according to the condition he is in, the type of terrain he is meeting, the weight of the pack, and his eagerness to accomplish his purpose) may be long or short, he leans on his stock or against a cliff or sits down a few moments and observes whence he has come and how. He may think of other trips beyond the skyline of mountains behind his starting place. He describes the past to himself in these backward-looking pauses, then continues on his way to create the future.

The composite plot must, as has been said, emphasize the chronological more than the regressive time order. It uses the regressive only for explanation or to point especial significance. Nonetheless, it seldom pauses long in its forward-moving pace. It keeps its feet marching ahead and only looks back over its shoulder. It must make these swift glances not only yield up the necessary reader information but also lend a dramatic quality to the chronological sequences. To say it yet another way, these regressive interludes or flashbacks should be interpolated in such a timely fashion that the result will be heightened

interest through dramatized information, and the story will step up in appeal rather than level off.

But how can this be done?

The composite plot takes for its time of forward action a few hours, days, or weeks; practically never a few months or years. True, many stories you have read may at first appear to take place sometimes over a long period of time. That illusion is achieved simply by regressive interruption—brief (or extended) and sharply-focussed. Check this with a story you are reading today. If a composite story plot is to run its length in a few hours or days, the regressive units will probably be larger though fewer than those in the yarn which covers a longer chronological time of new or forward action. But regressive elements should never be interpolated until the writer feels absolutely sure that the sense of the story or the actions of the characters cannot otherwise be explained. At such a point the writer will determine the *minimum* amount of information needed. Then either by putting this explanatory matter into dialogue to give it a more dynamic quality, or by describing, or contrasting and comparing a past incident or situation with the present, the author swiftly adds this piece of otherwise static exposition to the yarn and moves hastily on.

The story that begins at a dramatic moment, regardless of chronology, cuts back to pick up the necessary chronological thread, then scurries on to another point where, without really pausing, it is safe to take another breathless, over-the-shoulder peep, is the modern popular fast-action story that keeps its reader constantly hungry for more. It may not be literature but, for the reader, it seems very close to life.

True, there are moments when a yarn should come almost to a dead stop. This, naturally, depends entirely upon the story pace. The dead stop, the dramatic pause, does at least two things: it makes for suspense and it presently gives the reader a chance to breathe normally. The material following the pause—if it has come at an exciting moment—should present a complete contrast in speed, type of action, and atmosphere. But it should not continue the contrast for long. It should build quickly toward the pace level of the previous scene, or stop for a scene shift within a few paragraphs; otherwise it will dull the edge of the reader's eagerness.

In terms of proportion the regressive elements (the flashbacks) should seldom approximate more than one-third of the composite plot, and the fraction one-fourth or even one-tenth is preferable if possible. At best, the flashback is bound to seem somewhat second-hand. It is, after all, past action and it should, accordingly, be employed with caution. Nearly every dull spot in a story may be traced to faulty discrimination on the part of the author, and the regressive element is, oftener than not, the offending factor.

From the piazza of a Cape Cod cottage where I used to summer I could look along the golden crescent of the beach to a small and rocky headland some miles to the north. Its sides were yellow-streaked with sand and on its crown and shoulders clung a dark-green growth of scrub. The sea had gnawed quite patiently at this cliff. It had managed to undermine and tumble down great boulders to the shore. And this done, to drag them a dozen rods farther toward the water, there to form them in a broken,

crooked finger pointing to the far horizon. Under the afternoon sun, the headland was a thing of singular and rugged beauty, quiet save for the mew of wheeling gulls and the chitter of swallows. So now, and so throughout the long and drowsy summer.

But in winter it was quite another thing. Then when the cannonading surf fought furiously up the steeps and sometimes to the top a hundred feet above, this pleasant promontory became a grim, embattled ancient, standing the onslaughts of huge sheets of shore ice tossed like driftwood to the summit to batter down the naked scrub and brush. Then the headland would achieve a character of awful majesty and shoulder its way up into the sullen clouds of winter with a kind of dreadful and determined desperation.

The night storms were the worst. And it was during one of these, not many years ago, that a passenger ship was blown off its course and toward the headland in spite of all the crew's maneuvering. It had crept inside the horn of the Cape to escape the buffeting of a tempest on the open ocean, when a sudden blast of the gale drove it broadside into a hidden reef just beyond the crooked finger of the headland boulders. On the rocks it crashed, five hundred yards from shore, beaten by waves which were lifting far above the cliff. There the ship lay, its stern at a crazy angle, its panic-stricken passengers waiting for the combers to pound the hull to bits. Lifeboats, loosed from their davits, had been crushed like match sticks before they could swing free. Clear it was that the pumps could not much longer hold against the spreading gape in the keel.

Just around the headland not many rods away was a coast guard station. The men there had observed the ship in her plight and had tried to send their cutters out to take off passengers and crew. But the first boat had cap-

sized almost before it cleared the shore, and the next, badly sprung by ice and smashing waves, turned back, its men declaring that no craft or human being could live through the horror of that hurricane to reach the ship and offer any aid. The only hope they had was that the ship might hold together until the storm abated. . . .

But how does all this concern our discussion? Well, it illustrates—or will, when it is concluded—the essential elements of the composite short story plot (stressing the chronological) which may develop out of a factual incident. Let us examine what we have so far and then go on. To begin with, we are faced with a purposeful struggle—a conflict between man and nature. The general objective, immediately obvious, is: To prove that man's skill and, perhaps, heroism can sometimes triumph over the challenge of nature. The specific objective is indicated but, up to the present, incompletely stated. A triangle is evident: the ship with its passengers represents the thing endangered which must be saved; next, the storm which is the opposing force, the element creating the threat; and third, to be perhaps the resolving force, is the group on the beach which by now composes not only the coast guard but also the inhabitants of nearby cottages and others. Out of the entanglement of these three elements will come the problem-solution or attainment of the objective.

Yet there is nothing new or particularly interesting in this situation. Above all, it is dreadfully impersonal. No names have been mentioned. The reader simply wonders how the not extraordinary—though admittedly desperate—affair can be brought off without too much bother or hocus-pocus. An academic, almost scientific interest is the only one which so far can be appealed to. . . .

But stay! Behind the headland where its shoulders dip

down into a broad meadow, thence to a fringe of woodland screening the main road and civilization, there is a tiny white cottage. Here lives Jim Barton, a carpenter. Jim is a young man, twenty-five or so, lean and tough, browned by years of the Cape sun almost to the hue of a "Portygee." He has been "batching it" there of late, what with his wife at a hospital in Boston having their first baby. Sure, that was expensive; but he wanted her to have the best in care and attention. And when she and the baby were able to travel again, they were coming home by boat, as good Cape Codders should.

That night, the night they were expected, he had gone to meet them at the wharf, a dozen miles along and down the Cape. He drove the rattling flivver through a growing blizzard to the pier, there to find that the ship had decided not to try for port but to attempt to ride out the gale in the calmer waters of a little bay near home—the little bay just inside the headland. The storm whipped up great drifts across the road as he sped back, shivering and worried, to get a bite to eat in the lonely little cottage, then plod over through the high-piled snow to the coast guard station.

The great searchlights were already playing through the thickening snow-curtain upon the ship stranded and helpless on the reef. Now as he came to the edge of the beach, he saw the second cutter turn back in despair and fight its way to shore.

"No use," they said, in answer to his question. "No man alive can make that ship tonight."

But somebody must! *His wife and little boy were on that boat.* They must be brought ashore before the craft split wide upon the reef and all aboard were lost. His baby and

his wife! He shook the sea-sprayed shoulders of the dripping coast guard chief. Somebody must, or . . . Under the glare of searchlights and the flicker of oil torches, those gathered on the beach saw Jim Barton, after a futile last appeal, turn about and race along and up the ice-fringed shore to a little snowy inlet where was moored a dory that he used for lobstering during his idle hours. They guessed his plan and ran to stop him. But before they could prevent him, he had shoved off into the gale to battle with the chop and surge of freezing surf. . . .

The tale continues in a way that sounds like fiction. By some miracle he reached the ship, took off his wife and little child, and after getting them to shore and in safe hands, turned back to save the others—passengers and crew. At his heroic challenge the coast guard took heart; under his direction they put out again into the storm and hours later rescued all the rest. That night in the tiny cottage just below the shoulders of the headland a tired country carpenter rejoiced to be united with his wife and little son. . . .

Let us look back to see how this real life narrative parallels the fiction pattern. The story, you will notice, suddenly achieves a personal, an important meaning upon the appearance of the carpenter. The objective becomes sharply specific when it is learned that his wife and child are aboard. Although the narrative was purposely condensed at its most exciting and important point—the carpenter's struggle with the sea—it should be clear that before and after that to gain the major objective, the carpenter had to deal with many lesser ones. At the outset, the blizzard was a hindering force; the failure of the ship to dock, another. Then the

refusal of the coast guard offered yet another. And when he launched his dory in the sea, many other obstacles beset his trail through icy combers to the ship and back. The one regressive element occurs in the section which introduces him and refers to past action before moving to the immediate situation.

You have read in this and most other books on writing that the obstacle or opposing force provides much of the interest, challenge, and suspense to fiction. The gaining of the principal objective includes the winning of many smaller ones, each with its own little obstacles which must be overcome, one at a time, and patiently, until the last has been removed. The problem which concerns most beginning writers is how to determine the number of obstacles for a given story. It would be ridiculous for me to attempt to fix the number of these crisis-peak elements in a yarn, but I do know this, that out of some 266 short stories which I have read, simply for the purpose of analysis, the following facts appeared: all had a general and specific story objective; 180 of these yarns each averaged nine to ten important scene-objectives with their accompanying obstacles and solutions (these were six-thousand-word narratives); out of fifty-eight more stories of 4,000 to 5,000 words each, the average was six to seven scene problems; and of the remaining tales, which were not so long—mainly short short stories—each averaged about four.

The briefer the story, the fewer the scene problems; yet many a writer feels that the scenes remain the same in number but are condensed in detail. One thing is clear: no story, unless it be handled by an expert, yields much of interest to the reader of popular fiction if it contains

fewer scenes than those indicated above. It may, now and then, have double the number and be extraordinarily good, but in this case the scene elements must be very skillfully integrated, each tested for its individual objective, and all reduced slightly in length.

The scenes of a story are the links in its narrative chain. One end of the chain—the beginning of the yarn—should be so firmly moored to the announced or implicit story purpose that when it is raised—as it must be on an upward curve of increasing interest—it can be pulled taut by the intensity of incident or pace or style and not come loose. Then, it must be properly hooked in at its upper end to the attainment of the objective—the solution of its principal problem—or the "wow!" (as Hemingway calls it). I visualize it often another way—this mounting curve of articulated interest units. I see it as a ladder: each step to be taken is a problem; each step gained, a solution. Each rung must appear a bit more difficult to gain than was the one below; each new one must leave the reader at a giddier height. Something—call it the satisfaction of previous success or faith in the central character—spurs him on behind; something—which is the exciting and not completely predictable reward at the top—beckons him on ahead. That is the rising line of interest in the conventional short story. The writer must create that swift sweep of mounting interest or he will never long or successfully write for an excitement-eating reader public.

The "Plant"

Problems of characterization, dialogue, description, and exposition will be discussed after the mechanics of plot have been dealt with, but associated with all of these

elements and with plot is an item of considerable interest and importance both to story and to writer. It is that word, sentence, paragraph, or scene which is universally known as the "plant." The plant is a fact or situation intentionally established, early in the yarn, to be used later to explain or resolve some phase of a scene or of the whole story. It is, then, a preparation for a later purpose, and as many plants as can serve a legitimate end may be used in any narrative. The introduction of the plant must always be unobtrusive, and it functions best when it serves more than one purpose. The way the plant works may be seen in the following examples:

A character, presented early in the story, is shown as addicted to peanut munching. He nearly always has peanuts in his pocket, and eats them at every opportunity. For a time this seems to the reader simply like characterization, but later on when in a bank holdup one of the masked men is observed to toss peanuts nervously into his mouth, the object of the plant becomes plain.... Here, as circumstantial evidence, it can be intentionally misleading. A kidnap note is examined by the police. They find a certain word peculiarly misspelled. One of the characters in the story has been previously pointed out as always misspelling that particular word; thus the possible implications of the plant are clear.... It may be a plant to make one of the story characters lame or nearsighted.... It is a favorite trick to show the villain or some other actor early in the story to be suffering from heart trouble; his sudden death at the crisis of the tale becomes in this way plausible.... The setting of a stepladder beside a Christmas tree for an entirely legitimate reason (let us say to replace a burned-out light bulb near

the top of the tree) becomes a plant when, later in the story, a character is found dead at the base of the tree, and it is taken for granted that he accidentally fell from the ladder, struck his head on the metal standard of the tree, and so died. . . . It may be a plant to have one of the actors stutter or to have him perpetually trying to do something (in itself perhaps not very important but characteristic), which, at the conclusion of the story, he does do with a vast satisfaction.

As I have already said, the plant appears at its best when its real purpose is well concealed and variously employed. If, for instance, it is clearly indicated at the outset of a story that a certain train is always fifteen or twenty minutes late, and, during the first half of the story, that lateness is made to have a bearing—though unimportant—upon one or more of the early scenes, the reader eventually overlooks the significance of the plant and simply takes it as an incidental part of the yarn. Later, when its real objective is reached, the reader not only accepts its use as legitimate but because of familiarity with it is actually well pleased with it as a resolving force.

Can you find the plants in the following paragraphs?

A wise-cracking yokel, the terror of his little hamlet, takes a trip to New York, having promised his admirers that he will meet and outwit one or more of the city slickers they have heard so much about. Though ignorant, he is shrewd. He distributes his small stock of bills in various parts of his threadbare suit. He is a great beer guzzler and vain about his capacity. Upon arriving in the city, he goes to a saloon where he is immediately recognized as a countryman by the bar-flies. One in particular of the hangers-on, called "Alky" Malone, determines to take the rustic into camp. . . .

A prep school youth, who, when a child, went swimming with his companions and was almost drowned, has ever since had a horror of the water. He recalls very clearly his every sensation during the near-tragedy and it has become a definite obsession with him. At boarding school the athletic coach, who has been told by the boy's mother of this situation, determines to rid him of the complex, and after many months succeeds in teaching the boy not only how to swim, but to become an excellent swimmer. In an interscholastic contest at the end of the year, the youth wins his event and returns home proudly with the prize. A young girl in whom he has become interested moves into the summer cottage next the one in which he and his family are living. On a certain day while she is out alone in a boat on a nearby lake a storm comes up and the girl is in peril of death. The youth returns from a trip to the town just in time to discover her predicament. He has never swum in this lake however expert he may be in the school tank. . . .

A contractor bribes one of the city officials to see to it that his bid to construct a school building is accepted. The price makes it impossible for him to meet the specifications with quality material. He does the job with inferior stock, from heating plant to roof, and makes many thousands of dollars. Within a few years the defective material begins to give way. He has seen to it that his young daughter was enrolled in another school. One of his daughter's friends, however, is a student in the shoddy building, and one winter afternoon invites her to a little party there. The day is extraordinarily cold, and the janitor has to force the boilers to keep the schoolrooms warm. Late that afternoon the contractor learns where his daughter has gone. . . .

A girl, who practically never goes to visit anyone without forgetting, when she leaves, some article or other which she has brought with her, becomes engaged to be married. Her fiancé holds a position of trust in a big insurance company. The girl's step-father, whom she has always secretly despised, is found dead under mysterious circumstances. . . .

A dealer in second-hand cars, who is known to drive a hard and not always legitimate bargain, is one day in a moment of weakness completely taken in. A guileless-looking, youthful stranger with a lisp has managed to sell him a used car which proves to be junk. The dealer swears to do two things: one, to dispose of the car, and, two, to get back at the youth. Only one bright spot consoles him: he paid the youth sixty dollars in twenty-dollar bills, one of which he knew to be counterfeit. He notifies the police that he suspects the youth to be a counterfeiter and gives them a description of him. Meanwhile he puts the car in fair running order, repaints it; and otherwise changes its appearance, and drives it to a nearby country town to display it for sale. . . .

Final Considerations

Some of the points in the following outline have already been variously stressed; others are mentioned for the first time and will be detailed here or later. All are intended to aid the author in checking strengths and weaknesses in his narrative. They should be learned in such a manner that they can become a subconscious guide or intuitive pattern in the process of fiction building.

1. Every "happy-ending" commercial fiction story is based upon an objective which must be attained at the conclusion of the yarn to give the whole piece significant purpose.

2. The objective is usually announced in terms of a problem or "situation," and the solution of the problem or resolution of the situation indicates the meeting of the objective.

3. The objective of the story must be fundamentally interesting; it must, in other words, be based upon an idea which has, in a sense, universality of importance or appeal.

4. An objective, not in itself of extraordinary importance, may still be developed interestingly by the use of one of several methods. While most of these lie outside the province of plot, they deserve mention here as plot-aids.

a. By the creation of an unusual character or group of characters who may, because of their vivid personalities and by the interplay of these personalities, make the most banal situation seem quite the contrary.

b. By emphasizing one or more of the following qualities: timely events, current public attitudes, and predictable future activities; little known or extremely colorful settings and background; and tense and absorbing atmosphere. Most stories stripped of any of the above characteristics and reduced to essential plot sound pretty thin and ordinary. The skeleton of every body must be present to hold the flesh together, but the contour, the way it is dressed, the personality in action, all combine to give it its interesting individuality.

c. By a certain piquancy of style, difference in pace, or peculiar juxtaposition and swift multiplication of incidents, many a yarn of dully-routine structure can be given the feel of freshness and originality. The reader may be swept along enough by the vitality of *manner* to overlook the dullness of *matter*.

5. When the author fixes upon his story objective and the general plot approach to its attainment, his next most important job is to build a narrative introduction which, like the "lead" in a newspaper piece, will contain an attention-arresting or interest-creating situation. It may include the announcement of the objective-problem, but it more probably will pave the way for the posing of the objective. The opening paragraph of the introduction may be attacked variously:

a. With the *essay lead*, an example of which is:

"Country life is considered by the average city dweller as the end toward which he is forever working. He looks forward to the day when, having made his pile, he can close up his town house and retire to some simple little cottage amid bucolic surroundings, there to lead an unhurried, uncomplex existence until he is called to his fathers. Just such a plan Harrison Carey was about to realize. At the age of thirty-eight he had saved all he felt he would need for the years to come. He had bought the tiny cottage in the hills. And on September 7, 1936, his business affairs properly concluded, he packed up and headed for the little town of Cedarville, Vermont."

This type of beginning through a kind of general truth leads the reader casually to a specific situation. It names the actor, touches upon his background, and in a broad way indicates his immediate purpose.

b. The *photographic lead* may eventually take in too much territory, descriptively, if it is not carefully restricted. Picturesquely it moves, like the preceding introduction, from the general to the specific before it presents the character:

New York was awash in a veritable cloudburst that night. Black and colored mushrooms of umbrellas sprouted along the sidewalks and shouldered one another at the intersections. The false flickering rainbow of the million lights in Times Square glanced off the shiny tops of taxicabs and eddied iridescently across the rain-soaked pavement. Muffled by the storm, the roar of Broadway rose and fell with that rhythm peculiar to crowded places. It was during one of these lulls, in a moment of comparative silence, that pedestrians on the west side of 44th street suddenly heard a strange and penetrating cry. Karen Stafford heard it, too, as she slammed the door of a taxi and forced her way into the knot of people gathered at the curb.

c. The *direct presentation lead* may show the central actor immediately and dramatically but in a very minor scene which has as its purpose merely the revealing of his character:

"Old Matson glared at the clerk as if he had been offered a personal insult. He scooped the dime off the counter, shoved it back into his flabby pocketbook and shuffled out. 'Whole dang village must think I'm a millionaire,' he muttered, as he crawled into his buggy and whipped the fleabitten nag into a shambling trot. 'Never paid more'n a nickel for that terbacker, and ain't gonna begin now.' "

d. The *indirect presentation lead* may mention the principal actor and the story objective through action or dialogue of minor characters. For instance:

"They tell me," said Mrs. Grigsby, tartly, while she poured the tea into one of the Tuesday Club's new cups, "that Sally Curtis has made her boast that she will marry the first eligible young man who comes to town this summer."

Mrs. Allerton's thin lips tightened. "I'd just like to get a chance to see that young man first and put a bug in his ear," she snapped.

e. The *actor-objective lead* may present the principal character directly and, at the same time, suggest the objective.

The three men sat around the desk and smoked silently, while Martin made little figures in his notebook. "It keeps summing up to the same thing," he said, finally. "The situation will remain unchanged until Boss Malone and his gang are broken. I can do the job with your help, but I don't want that girl as an assistant."

"Can't you see, though, Mart," objected one of the men, "that she's our only entrée to the City Hall?"

Martin shook his head. "I never yet have been able to depend upon a woman," he growled, "and I certainly would hate to trust anything important to a young thing that seems so irresponsible as Kitty Cartwright."

f. In the "*I*" *lead*, or introduction of a story told in the first person (and by the chief character), certain combinations can be made:

When I was just a youngster, I remember how emphatic the citizens were about Lawson, the bank president. 'Mean Lawson' they used to call him. 'Like father like son,' they would say, although it always struck me as odd that it was a daughter about whom that prediction was made. They said she'd lead somebody a fine song and dance if anybody ever took her seriously. And I was amused to hear that she was teasing the new cashier. As for myself, I was well protected by having known her too long, really, to be interested, although she certainly was an attractive girl, judged by the standards of Littleton or of New York.

There are, of course, a number of other possible introduction angles, but the above comprise the types most popular with magazine readers. It should be remembered that when the reader begins a short story, he expects to meet a challenge to his interest which will be enough to capture and hold his attention. He wants to find that the author has the hero "on the spot" almost from the very start of the narrative. Next he wants to know how this happened. Then he is willing to stay with the author through the rest of the story, provided there is a promise and eventual realization of sufficient action, excitement, and complication in the business of getting the hero plausibly extricated.

6. Once the introduction has been effected, the ob-

jective implied or stated, with the characters and setting properly pictured, the author faces the task of filling out the body of the yarn. He will often discover at this moment that he is beset by an impulse which he must instantly and vigorously resist—an impulse (dictated by the demands of interest and the brisk pace he has hit) to let the introduction join the conclusion too swiftly; in other words, to let the problem of the objective reach its solution before the body has been adequately completed.

The body of a story constitutes its suspense. It keeps apart the beginning and end of the yarn until a certain magic something in the author's mind cries, "Enough." Just what that magic something is, no one can precisely say. Two authors, using the same plot, never hit upon the same length, number, or kinds of scenes, or exactly the same dramatically-timed moment. Here the writer must depend upon his own personal background, information, and inspirational equipment. If he has read enough good stories, if he has calculated the details of his plot well enough, if he has enough of that sense called "narrative proportion," he will make the suspense unit right.

7. Narrative proportion must be self-taught, but some of its skeletal mechanics can be stated. Its purpose is to create and distribute emphasis in terms of greatest dramatic value. It means (1) checking each scene to determine the reason for its existence, i.e., testing each scene for its own problem, impeding and resolving forces, and solution; (2) making sure that it contains some repetition, by statement or implication, of the chief story objective; and (3) discovering that the length or strength of the scene does not change in any way the general point of view and purpose of the narrative.

8. The body of the story represents its suspense division because the scenes themselves are suspense elements. Suspense is the reader's fear that the principal character will fail in his purpose. Thus to maintain the suspense, the author must proportion sensitively the moments of the character's winning and losing. If he permits him to win for a while, he must presently force him to lose. If it then appears plausible for the hero to win again, the loss that follows that must not only seem to equal all previous gains but promise to exceed them by just enough for the reader to become definitely disturbed regarding the happy outcome of the entire tale. This cat-and-mouse practice the author should follow not necessarily rhythmically but certainly regularly. By doing this, the story moves with suspense toward the greatest obstacle (then triumph) of all at the climax. Threatening, up until almost the last instant to make the hero lose this most important battle, the author permits him (at a breathless, final minute) to achieve success and a definitely heroic stature as the actor solves his greatest problem and so attains his objective.

9. As I have previously pointed out, the conclusion unit of the story contains the problem-solution, which is the attainment of the objective. This completion of the story purpose should find every scene problem, along with that of the whole tale, satisfactorily disposed of. No good writer permits dangling narrative threads to fringe his final story-solution. Every question must be taken care of, every implication resolved—if not by actual statement then certainly by promise.

The conclusion unit should be brief, swift, and dramatic. If he employs an anti-climax the writer must try for an unpredictable twist, a surprising turnabout, a complete

change or reversal of the situation. Without the anti-climax, he should seek a skillful, crisp word, sentence, or short paragraph (which above all things must never be the result of coincidence) to bring the central character to satisfying success.

Coincidence may begin a yarn but it must never end one. Neither the indisputably foregone conclusion nor the *deus ex machina*, the conclusion that is weak, fumbling, or even faintly implausible can ever be permitted. Nothing so enrages a reader as to find that the mountain has brought forth a mouse. Nothing makes him feel so cheated as to learn that he has spent time and eagerness and hope upon something which proves an insult to his intelligence.

The concluding line of every story should be its "hay-maker." It should make the reader rejoice with the success of the central character; it should make him feel as if he were in a manner responsible for the triumph and, by so identifying himself with the actor, be able to enjoy legitimately the hero's achievements, honors, and satisfactions. If this last line (or paragraph, or group of paragraphs) of the conclusion can be written before the rest of the story itself is done, it will always have more vitality and lift to it than it has when, in so many cases, it must represent the expiring gasps of the work-worn author. Many a yarn fails of publication because its climax and final lines indicate an unconscious let's-polish-it-off-now-and-have-done-with-it attitude.

Take this, then, as a final admonition about conclusion building: don't try to finish the story if the "last curtain" cannot fall upon a high, strong and plausible note.

IV. CHARACTERIZATION AND OTHER PROBLEMS

THE modern popular short story is a synthesis of plot and characterization with plot the stronger element. According to the quality or purpose of the publication, the stress on characterization varies. In the pulps and the straightforward action magazines, the reader-interest lies more in what is done and how it is done than in the actor who is responsible for the doing. In such magazines as *Cosmopolitan*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and others on the upper popular level, characterization closely equals plot in importance. To understand the creative bases of characterization, the author should analyze the psychological approach of the reader to story characters. He will find that the reader becomes acquainted with and learns to appraise each actor in the piece in one or all of the following ways: (1) by what the actor does; (2) by what he says; (3) by what he thinks; (4) by the reaction of other characters to him; (5) by what the author chooses to say, editorially, about him.

1. In working out the details and growth of a character, the author should determine in advance precisely the limitations of the actor's job. He must never call upon him to do anything which has not previously been indicated to be well within the performer's power. It is, for instance, obviously illogical for the author to demand that a stripling tackle a pugilist and expect him to come off anything but second best. It is unlikely that a drugstore clerk can suddenly, when the moment requires it, become a good

horseback rider. It is improbable that an average man with little experience in shooting would be able to seize a revolver and discover himself an excellent marksman. It is equally incredible that a person without experience could swiftly effect such a skillful disguise that it would fool a shrewd enemy. A man unaccustomed to physical labor would not very reasonably be able to undertake and do a piece of work better than those who have had many years of training. A young lawyer sometimes wins his first case, but if it is a very important or complex one, his success would at best be accidental. The actual record of those who have a chance to pinch-hit for the chief is not half so inspiring or dramatic as many poorly constructed stories would make it.

But all of these action situations *can*, by careful introduction and preparation, be made fairly plausible and reveal the character convincingly and properly to the reader. In the case of the stripling in conflict with the pugilist, the author can direct the reader's appraisal, can build up the possibility of success for the youth not only by "plants" along the way, but by emphasizing certain facts during the scene of struggle. For instance, the youngster may have been shown as adept at jujitsu; he may have been an amateur boxer in school or college; he may have the advantage of top condition, while his opponent is badly fatigued, intoxicated, or otherwise incapacitated. He may have the assistance of a familiar environment in which he is able to call upon certain natural aids. He may have information regarding some special or characteristic weakness of his rival and accordingly be able to trade upon it. At any rate, he must have the reason for his success well determined and more or

less unconsciously agreed upon by the reader well in advance of his actual winning. In other words, as it is in plot, plausibility by preparation in action is one of the most important points in character-building and character revelation.

2. The reader learns about the characters through what they say. At the same time, the reader decides—unconsciously again—what his attitude shall be toward each character. Dialogue demands of the writer the ability to be at least two persons at the same time, and to distinguish carefully for the reader the difference in personalities between or among the actors involved. Good dialogue writers seldom do exposition or description at all well, although they manage plot quite cleverly. Upon a time the stage stole the best manufacturers of fiction conversation, but today radio is attracting many more. There are few real, practical rules for creating good dialogue—dialogue that will both picture the characters adequately and advance the story.

Certain authors give their players personality by some easily remembered and characteristic word, phrase, or manner of speaking, and accompanying action. Smartness, for instance, is often gained by dividing the speech with the responsive, "he said's", "she remembered's," at unexpected, unconventional places in the dialogue sentence. Note the methods of such authors as Clarence Budington Kelland and Walter D. Edmonds (to pick contrasting types), and you will observe the dialogic flipness or dramatic strength resulting from this device. But in attempting to characterize an actor, the author must be careful not to over-detail the action or tone of voice of the speaker. After the writer has used, "he muttered nastily,

with that same twitch of his lip"; "she gurgled happily"; "he opined thoughtfully"; "they snickered irreverently," he should realize that the reader will welcome a few bald unlabored "he said's" and "she said's." In fact, the complete omission of these expressions for a half dozen speeches will increase the speed of the dialogue, while simplifying it.

And this matter of simplicity is something worth noting. It is as much to be desired as is complexity in the story development. Most readers unconsciously supply a great deal of action and description to dialogue if they are permitted to interpret for themselves in order to form their own personal mental pictures of the tone of voice, way of speaking, and probable physical or psychological reactions of the performers. If the "he said's" and "she said's" are trimmed off the dialogue for a number of speeches (once the actors have been identified), the author still can differentiate between the voices this way: by one character's calling another by name now and then; by previously showing distinctions in dialect between the speakers; by a difference in emotional intensity; by characteristic expressions or thought patterns.

At this point let me digress a moment. The rules of punctuation maintain that every new speech should begin a new paragraph. This is not necessarily true. Speeches which the writer wishes to have follow one another with realistic speed should be run together without paragraphing. But pursue this practice cautiously, and make the dialogue paragraph fairly brief. The next speech to be given a new paragraph should, if possible, take advantage of its dramatic and solitary position and indicate some minor or major turning point in the conversation.

Dialect in dialogue should be used sparingly. Its purpose is to *suggest* rather than *reproduce* the exact dialectic sounds. When dialect is reduced to a few characteristic words and linguistic twists, it can still give the effect required without confusing the reader. The Negro stories by Octavus Roy Cohen, the S. S. Van Dine detective yarns show how successful authors handle this problem. Here is an instance of complication and simplification in dialect.

"Cum h'yah, y'all outa thet theah littul clump o' bresh, end hump yourse'ves," growled Big Damron menacingly.

"Come here, you-all out of that there little clump of bresh and hump yo'selves," growled Big Damron menacingly.

Dialogue can be made not only to reveal but to sustain character. An actor indicated as essentially laconic must hold to his character (unless some dramatic purpose is served by a temporary change) by continuing to speak tersely throughout the story. Other speech characteristics, such as stuttering, word-order inversion, and other typical and purposeful linguistic markings must never be forgotten by the author once he has begun them.

Dialogue advances the action of a story by creating and removing narrative obstacles. It humanizes characters and makes dynamic parts of the yarn that otherwise would have to be formally expository or descriptive. But however valuable dialogue is, there is no rule in fiction writing which demands that every story begin with speech. Talk may be interesting enough, but it can readily become a very cheap commodity. No reader will tolerate much of it unless now and then he can get a physical picture of the characters who are speaking and can know

something of their background and foreground. An experienced author gets to know intuitively when to start and when to stop conversation and introduce exposition. He is sensitive enough to recognize the time to shift to straightforward narrative, so that the reader can rest his "mind-ear" and for a while simply use his "mind-eye." The beginning author may take seriously the remark that in the long run it is the characters who tell the story, but he should be warned against turning these actors into mere phonographic voices. There is still something worth remembering in the old maxim, "Actions speak louder than words." Really good fiction achieves a delicate balance between these two extremes.

3. The actor's character is built up by the revealing of his thoughts which the author, omnisciently, may describe. Again, thought may be indicated by the character's own reactions, or yet again, by another player's surmise about the other's thinking. Examples of these different methods follow.

He realized at that instant that the work he had planned for months was about to be undone. And, sensitive as always to such a premonition, he determined not to be caught napping.

The remark seemed to be kindly intended, but Nora burst into tears, whipped off her apron, flung it angrily into the chair, and fled to her room.

Gerin peered curiously up into the old man's face. "No, 't won't do you any good to look toward the door and wonder why Mallory ain't come. The door's locked, the house is surrounded, an' Mallory's bound for South America."

4. A character may be sketched by the responses of the other players to him. This is shown in dialogue or by direct action.

The children cringed as he strode by.

She smiled confidently, and her whole attitude seemed to change to one of assurance as he signed the contract with a flourish.

"You're new here, Naylor," grunted the benchman, "or you wouldn't ask a thing like that. He's the toughest, smartest guy in these here parts, and they say he just don't never lose a fight, a bet, or a woman."

5. The author may fix the essential character of an actor by direct description. For instance:

Harmon was the sort of person whose sheer persistence had won him a place in the financial world. Ruthless, vindictive, aggressive, he had a prodigious memory for anyone who had ever slighted him. He had but one sentimental streak in his whole nature, and that concerned Irene, his eighteen-year-old daughter, whom he worshiped with an intensity that was close to fanaticism. As he had grown older, his world split for him into two great divisions: The Harmon Steel Works which must succeed, and his little girl who must be made happy.

In presenting a character for the first time, the author should keep in mind that his job is not to give a complete picture objectively and subjectively of the individual, but simply to identify him sufficiently for the reader to recognize him upon his next appearance. Thereafter (depending upon the importance of the actor) this character should be made to grow until by the time one-third of the story is over, every major feature of the player will be fixed in the reader's mind, and he will thereafter take for granted that these characteristics will not only be sustained but will be constantly strengthened. Minor characters, depending upon the significance of their rôles, can be sketched with a few brief words or typical actions which

will, in turn, settle finally their places in the yarn. Unless some particular purpose is to be served by the detailing of the physical or mental set-up of a minor character, the description can be as brief as in the following examples.

Sure enough, there was tattered old Uncle Lem lounging on the platform. He shambled up, grinning, with his big beard blowing in the breeze.

There was an interruption, when a gray-haired, solemn butler came silently in, carrying a silver tray with a card upon it.

Mrs. Tarbell arrived first, with her slip showing as usual and her bird-crested hat at a mad angle.

The three ragged little urchins ran pell-mell out of the shop, slamming the door as they went.

Grayson's assistant was tall and thin. He had a scholarly stoop and thick-lensed glasses which gave his eyes the effect of protruding inquisitively. Grayson called him "Frog" not only because of these eyes, but because every sound the man made came out like a croak.

Larry's sister was as slim as Kay, but considerably less pretty. Her hair was ash-colored and a faint querulousness played about her mouth. Kay always could tell when she disapproved by the way the lips tightened and a tiny vertical line appeared between her eyes.

Characterization, then, is a matter of dialogue, description, and exposition. It should never be cursory when it concerns one of the principal actors; it should never be sacrificed to plot, except when full-lengthed portraiture stands in the way of necessary forward action. Skillful characterization is more a test of good writing than is the facile handling of plot. But in the popular fiction piece it

should never take precedence over it, and seldom, if ever, should it compose as much as fifty per cent of the narrative content.

I have stated that characterization is created by exposition and description, as well as by dialogue. This is, of course, also true of setting and atmosphere. If you recall even faintly the days of your secondary-school English composition classes, you will remember hearing about the four kinds of composition, narration, description, exposition, and argumentation. You very likely recall that you had no trouble in differentiating between argumentation and narration, but that exposition and description always seemed so similar that you eventually gave up trying to draw any line between them. The result was (and still is, for many persons) that these compositional Siamese twins retained that complex mystery possible only to the simple and the commonplace.

Exposition simply means explanation. It reflects a process or defines an action. It is bound, by its very nature, to contain a sort of descriptive quality, but the real work of exposition is to form a bone structure rather than a body. Note the straightforward recording of physical and mental action in the following expository-narrative passage.

Brownell got to his feet, brushed the earth from his knees, and stood there a moment looking about. In that pause he attempted to foresee the events of the next two hours. Derek would, he knew, be at the house by now. The next move would be to get there soon enough to prevent Derek's leaving before the police arrived. With swift decision he tossed the burned out stub of his cigarette into the pool, turned and strode rapidly back along the path that led to the old vicarage. No one had seen him; of that he was certain.

As you examine the above quotation, you will note that the concern of the writer was merely to reveal and explain the character's thought and deed and so move the story forward. There are, naturally enough, a few descriptive words and phrases built into the paragraph, but the writer knew that any time spent in painting passive pictures at this particular moment would mean a delay in the progress of the scene. Thus he pared the inactive pictorial elements practically to nothing to release the vitality of the yarn.

Description, obviously, means depicting, snapshotting, portraying. Without the addition of exposition, it is a comparatively static thing, however accurate and colorful its details may be. Nearly every writer enjoys description while nearly every reader resents it except in capsule quantities. Since every author knows this to be true and realizes, therefore, that reader-interest evaporates in exact proportion to the increase in inactive portraiture, it is strange that he almost always permits himself so many album shots of not unpleasant but thoroughly dull photographic pieces.

Something more than a century ago, no less eminent an author than Sir Walter Scott recognized suddenly, close to the end of his writing career, that he had committed the unpardonable sin of dullness in virtually every story he had ever written. Therefore, in his plans to revise certain of his novels, there was a brisk determination to reduce the spate of mellifluous—but also somniferous—description to a comparative trickle, so that the more important expository elements might be uncovered and thus lay bare for the reader the narrative trail. All who know Scott's novels regret that death prevented him from carrying out his ambition, because some of his books, now

read increasingly less and less, contain as many as five consecutive pages of pure, beautiful, but dreadfully stultifying description.

You will please to understand that I have no quarrel with description when it is used in correct or dramatic proportion. In one form or other it is absolutely demanded by every story that has ever been and may ever be done. Remove description from a narrative, and most of the color is lost and, with it, that chance every author has to play upon the reader's senses. The reader does enjoy reacting to the scent of spring, the blue of the sky, the song of the birds, the flavor of the first wild fruits, the caress of the wind upon the forehead. But, without a sensitiveness to the delicate balance of reader-interest, the average author will overdo description until it becomes cloying. Sate the reader with sweetness, and you give him literary indigestion or sleep. In either case, it means the eventual destruction of thoughtful attention.

The following paragraph of straight descriptive-narration could run very little longer than it is without drifting the reader off to dreamland.

The vicarage was old—old and shabby and disheveled. Its timbers, dry and rotting, had long since been burned out in the heat of many summers. Spattered with gray and broken slates, its roof sagged from the weight of a century of winters' snows. Even the ivy that partially bearded the decay of the place was ancient-looking in its straggling gray-green vines. Fit symbol of the general air of dilapidation was the bent and wasted figure pottering about the yard. The aged man was dressed in threadbare clothes, not one garment of which had belonged originally with its current companion. He wore a faded, conical hat, the color of which might at first have been black but now was rusty and dust-flecked. His shirt was so tattered that it seemed to stay upon him only through the

agency of an equally ragged jacket, held together by a frayed cord. Out of the open neck of the shirt protruded a ropy, wattled throat. Trousers, that might upon a time have been blue, showed green in the afternoon sun as their bottoms disappeared into a pair of muddy, broken cowhide boots. . . .

Note the close cataloguing of detail. Granted that we all demand enough of a picture of persons, places, and things to be sufficiently interested to care what happens to them. But not many of us wish to be brought up so close to a character that we have to regard, solemnly, the pores in his face and so lose the contour of his features. And, it is equally true of the setting. Unless there is some important significance to the various elements of a setting, no one wishes to have them pictured inch-by-inch. If this holds for character portrayal and the painting of backgrounds, it holds also for everything else in the short story. Extended description can only warrant prodigality in words when the specific story purpose dictates it.

If a writer must overdo something (although I don't see why he should), he had better bear down upon dialogue. Conversation, though it may not be consistently sparkling or exciting, is almost always better at its awkwardest than deadly description. It is also less poisonous at its very worst than coldly detailed exposition. Yet all three of these elements—dialogue, description, and exposition—can be smartly interwoven to achieve a moving pattern of interest when they are dealt with in the right proportion. Just how that proportion may be come at no one knows for sure. The usual and conventional answer is, "By writing, writing, and still more writing," which is, after all, very likely true but not of great help to those eager authors who are in a great hurry.

But one thing *is* clear. The more information a writer

has about compositional mechanics and the psychology of these mechanics, the more likely is he to be able to construct his yarns with at least a semblance of technical facility. And he should know, therefore, that there are two kinds of exposition: (1) straightforward, unadorned explanation which exposes an action or a condition, and (2) exposition of a slightly less bald kind which in a limited way is dressed with description. Both of these types have their obvious purposes—and both are used regularly in every story. And the writer should also know that there are two kinds of description: one "pure" in the sense that it includes no expository matter whatsoever; the other embracing a bit of exposition for the sake of liveliness or for easier transitions. Both of these divisions of description are, of course, employed in every yarn.

The modern short story uses a great deal of ordinary exposition and a reasonable amount of description, but it stresses more a *combination* of the two forms in what is called (depending upon the emphasis) either "expository description" or "descriptive exposition." In this "third" compositional form exposition is found to be full-flavored with description, and it is particularly important to note that virtually every descriptive passage is shot through with the action or feel of exposition. The result is not merely informational motion on the one side and pleasant, colored photography on the other, but a very real moving picture.

The American reader demands that his yarns in the popular magazines present a stirring synthesis of sensory appeals. He may not know it, but the story which interests and holds him most has a plot structure, with strong characters boldly galvanized by a shrewdly conceived mixture of pictorial exposition and dynamic description.

UNIT TWO

CREATING TYPES OF THE SHORT STORY

INTRODUCTION

THIS unit takes for granted that the reader has studied the previous unit carefully and is now prepared to undertake one or another of the various types of short stories which compose the bulk of the average fiction publication. While the story pattern as a generality may be alluded to from time to time through the sections of this unit, it will not often be specifically mentioned. Rather is it to be understood as forming the foundation, changelessly, for every one of the story types hereafter discussed.

The four most popular types of the short narrative are, for American readers: (1) the adventure story, indigenous and foreign; (2) the love story, frankly sentimental or colorfully romantic; (3) the Western story—of the old as well as of the new West; and (4) the detective story, which may encompass also the mystery and thriller. Naturally there are other popular kinds of yarns worth noting. But there is not time or space in this book to detail their characteristics. The sports story, for instance, is widely read but has never achieved the vast public of the tales mentioned above. The animal story will always have an eager audience, but again it is somewhat restricted in appeal. (Read Albert Payson Terhune's essay on the dog story in Unit Eight—"The Author Discusses His Trade.") The sea yarn interests a limited number of readers. (See Unit Eight—James B. Connolly's essay on the sea story.) The pseudo-scientific narrative which deals with life a thousand or ten thousand years from now has its place in the fiction field but that place is small.

The confession story is simply a first person division of the love story. The war yarn classifies itself under the adventure narrative. The athletic tale belongs to sports; the hunting story to animal or adventure; and the fishing story to adventure, sports, or sea narratives.

Thus in arbitrarily narrowing the types of the popular short story to four, the author believes that the principal writer and reader interests are adequately covered.

The question which the beginning writer should ask himself as he examines this unit of the book is not "which of these types of stories do authors find easiest to do?" but "which kind of yarn am I best equipped informationally, intellectually, and temperamentally to essay?" From a marketing point of view no one of these story types is more easily sold than the next; and there is no price-per-word discrimination among them. Any story that is essentially and intrinsically *interesting* will, if it is done well, always be the right story for author, editor, and reader alike.

I. THE ADVENTURE STORY

CONSIDERED broadly, practically every fiction piece is an adventure story. It is a voyage into the unknown stuff of life. The reader uses fiction for an armchair adventure which will for a little while divert his attention from his own activities or make him appreciate them more or help him to understand his fellow beings a bit better. If this can be taken as a makeshift definition of the adventure yarn, then the following classifications are true: the western story is localized adventure; the war story, epic adventure; the love story, sentimental adventure; the sea story, an adventure with the elements; the animal story, an adventure in Nature; the detective story, an adventure in wit-matching; the mystery or horror story, a psychological adventure. So it is with every other kind of fiction which contains the fundamentals of romance. For adventure is romance: it means the teasing gleam of fairy fire over the marshes; the lure of the unknown behind a closed door or beyond the turn in the road or below the far horizon. It is the never-failing appeal of excitement to all men and all women whose pulses respond vigorously to the whipped-up blood of curiosity.

But to understand the adventure story as it becomes a special fiction type, we must narrow its extremities greatly. To do this practically we can employ as an important clue the particular demands of the editors of publications which carry adventure material. Here are some market notes from editors:

"We want adventure stories with strong characterization; any theme, any setting."

"Our magazine uses a high type of adventure story. It may be on any theme; its setting may be on any of the seven seas or urban or rural, Western or Northern, historical or business. We ask for strong plot, swift action, and a masculine appeal."

"Our readers expect any type of thrilling adventure story with an American hero preferred."

"Give us well-plotted fiction with fast action and he-man heroes."

"We can use the 'cloak and sword' type of story; romances of the old South, the Civil War, steamboats, privateers. A strong woman angle will be an advantage when a real man is the hero."

"Our specialty is the fast-moving, exciting, all-action story—always with American heroes. Strong, virile plots are required with the woman interest almost nil. Once in a while we can try the pseudo-scientific tale if it is especially good."

"Stories well-motivated in action, strong in characterization, sharp in dialogue, natural, real, and convincing, with the hero likable and appealing, the plot swift and exciting—we can use a lot of this kind of yarn."

"Fiction must be action-packed, well-planned, and well-written. It must be of the trip-hammer type, and move with increasing speed to a smashing conclusion in which everything comes out 'right.' "

"Send us stories with action and fast-moving plots that appeal to the intelligent, adult reader; some love interest is permissible."

"We would like to see some good fast-action shorts around 5,000 words—some girl interest but with sound motivation and good characterization."

"Let us look at your swift-moving action thrillers. The heroes—any men engaged in virile outdoor occupations: cowboys, lumberjacks, miners, engineers. Plenty of atmosphere and character."

"We are seeking more variety in plot and character. The heroes should represent the best in American wholesomeness and spirit."

Let us now draw up a bill of particulars concerning the adventure story and emphasize the "musts" for the adventure author to keep in mind:

1. *Subject.* The adventure story can employ as its subject nearly any practical subject. It taboos over-sentimentalized subjects, however, where the developing theme is likely to emphasize other than the masculine reaction. It also taboos most fantastic subjects, and those which stress sex and the boudoir setting. It gives short shrift to gruesome subjects and those based on any sort of propaganda or politics.

2. *Theme.* The theme of the adventure story derives from conflict; the struggle of man against man, man against animals, man against natural cataclysms, man against Fate; but seldom man against himself and never man against God. The purpose of the theme is to reveal man meeting whatever conflict is demanded and *winning* vigorously and plausibly.

3. *Characterization.* Within the past ten years, most adventure publications have been increasingly asking for sharper, less "typed" characterization. The old-time adventure tale of the conventional sort stressed action so heavily that the actors were paid little attention to. The result was that the principles in the cast of any adventure yarn until the late 1920's were each taken care of by a

sentence or two of physical description—just enough so that the hero was "tall, lean, ruddy-complexioned, and red-headed. His muscles were corded welts under his faded shirt, and he walked with the coiled-spring tension of a panther." Where he had come from made little difference but the reader learned that "in his clear frank eyes there was that look that told him to be a man who stood for the right and would fight for it." The heroine—if any—was usually "a slim, strong girl with corn-colored hair and eyes of corn-flower blue. She walked with a firm step, holding herself erect with a pride that told of fine ancestry and an inherited good-breeding which was evident in spite of her simple clothes." The villain was forever "a tall darkly sinister man with a scar on his left cheek which curled his lip under the black moustache into a vicious leer. His clothes were far too good to have been come by honestly and as soon as Jack (our hero) saw him, he realized that he must be on his guard against this plausible individual." Thereafter in the story little further detail of characterization was required save that which the action of the story predicated at the start—to make the hero a continuing triumph for good, the heroine an increasingly important influence upon the hero's ambition and the community's betterment, while the villain simply pursued his villainous way to prove that he was as everyone suspected from the beginning—a man past redemption.

The adventure story of today is avoiding these types as it would the plague. More time is spent upon the characters to make them definitely individual, to make them more believably human, and appealingly recognizable. The actors are thus permitted a few normal failings but only when the sum of their other characteristics will

credibly overcome these weaknesses. More careful preparation and motivation of character is demanded in today's adventure story and interestingly enough the action of the yarn has not suffered by the change. Plot is still the major issue, but characterization is running a close second with a much better story resulting.

4. *Plot.* As indicated in the previously mentioned market notes, the principal features of the adventure plot are speed, integration (a well-knit structure), and believability. The introduction of the yarn of adventure must start with a bang and keep on banging with repeated enthusiasm and increasing pace. The introduction will establish the principal characters in their setting, fix the plot purpose, and at least hint at the major conflicting elements. The body of the tale will build rapidly toward the conclusion with more and more action driving through every scene and with suspense so geared that it mounts with every scene-action unit. The conclusion of the adventure yarn must be as swift, brief, and satisfyingly final as the writer can make it. Above all this conclusion must be absolutely sound and convincing. No cheating, no forgotten plans, no faulty preparation will be tolerated by the adventure reader who is probably as intelligent as and certainly much more demanding than any other reader in the world. He doesn't want the plot to be too easy, too predictable. He is willing to work for what he gets (which is more than can be said for the average love story reader) and he writes to the editor and the author to praise or damn him with equal sincerity after he has finished reading the narrative. Except for the readers of juvenile magazines, adventure story readers are the greatest letter-writers on the globe.

5. *Setting.* The adventure story can be set in the city or country but its readers prefer more obviously romantic locales. The frozen poles, the heat-choked jungles, the mysterious Orient; the pampas of the Argentine, the wilds of the Canadian Rockies, the lagoons of the South Seas, the chartless reaches of the skies—in these settings the adventure-story reader luxuriates. Since he tries immediately to identify himself with the hero, he, like the hero, wants to see strange places, foreign faces, to undertake unexpected challenges in the midst of unaccustomed surroundings. He wants "to go where he hasn't been, to do what he hasn't done." Thus he cries for color, for atmosphere, for newness. The adventure-story writer who does a craftsmanlike job on his yarns will try to give his reader honest pictures. He will check up in detail on the climate, the flora, and certain fauna, along with the precise geographical location of such an island as Komodo before he sends his adventurer there to capture the giant lizard. He will check temperatures and rainfall, and the dates of the seasons in the copper country around Bogota before he sets his engineer upon a journey into the mountains. So the author must always know enough more than the average reader (and much more than he will actually use in the story) about background for the reader to depend upon the accuracy of his descriptions, dates, and circumstances, as he could upon the writings of a man of science.

6. *Atmosphere.* Much of the atmosphere in the adventure story comes from its romantic settings. Nearly every adventure plot moved out of its exotic or unusual locale would be considerably tamer. There is always heat or rain in the jungle, a brave wind blowing on the high Sierras, the yapping of the coyote on the western plains,

the repeated plaintive whistle of the quail in lowland meadows. A cold that digs deep through the furred parka into a man's very marrow on the icy wastes of Bering Straits; mellow golden-disked moons hanging over the mimosa-scented glades of glamorous Bali—all these create atmosphere for the adventure story and weave thrilling threads into the tapestry of romantic illusion. The reading and research necessary to build this atmosphere convincingly is well worth the time and trouble required.

7. *The Author.* A long-experienced adventure-story teller is usually himself a fascinating person because his pursuit of the out-of-the-ordinary place and practice has given him a wide horizon, an out-of-doors attitude and an appreciation of what it means to pioneer, to travel beyond the established boundaries where men come to grips with extraordinary facts of life. If the beginner would become a real adventure-yarn spinner, he must above everything else have the sort of imagination which is fired by atmosphere, setting, and action that break with our ordinary humdrum environment. And he must be able to translate this flame of excitement into a narrative which convinces because of its truth and sincerity.

(For further discussion of the adventure story, see Unit Eight—Leonard H. Nason's essay.)

II. THE LOVE STORY

ACCORDING to *Boy Meets Girl*, the Spewacks' successful Broadway burlesque of Hollywood manners and matters, builders of cinema tales are agreed that the formula of the love story is, in simple: "Boy meets Girl; Boy wants Girl; Boy loses Girl; Boy gets Girl." However we may deride the obvious flimsiness and inanity of this so-called narrative pattern, we cannot very readily get around the fact that from a commercial point of view, the movie industry has for many years been doing quite well in selling the public picture after picture with never a break or variation in this design. Nor has the cinema done it alone. "Light" novels and popular magazines, from *The Saturday Evening Post* down to the trashiest of the sex pulps, have for decades (and are likely to do so for more decades) encouraged yarns constructed upon this seemingly immutable skeleton. Likewise radio has emphasized in its adventure and comic strip stories the neat satisfactoriness of the love-yarn formula, and this makes close to a unanimous agreement among the media offering divertissement to an escape-seeking public.

Unanimity on the love-story formula among those agencies catering to the public taste is not too hard to understand. Readers and critics explain it regularly as the reasonable outcome of a romantic wishfulness of human beings the world over to enjoy, however vicariously, a varied, rich, satisfying, and eventually secure emotional life which, except in fiction, is denied them. The legion of book and magazine readers, movie-goers,

and radio-listeners may sometime become sufficiently sophisticated to accept as their regular fiction fare the kind of realistic yarn, frequently inspirational and not infrequently brutal, in which the hero and heroine, after their path of true love has run anything but smoothly, settle down to live anything but comfortably and happily ever after. But the failure of the great realistic narratives of literature to capture the catholic if not discriminating taste of the populace would seem to guarantee immortality to the conventional formula love story which is devoured daily by millions of readers throughout the world.

Granting then the existence of a design for the popular love story, let us set about to break it down into practical details. To begin with, we know that Boy must meet Girl (or Girl must meet Boy). The interest in the first few pages of the tale will depend entirely upon the skill with which the author introduces these characters to the reader and to each other. Either of two methods may be followed here. Both actors may be presented immediately, or one may prepare for the entrance of the other. If the first method is pursued, it again provides two choices: (1) the world adventure scheme, or (2) the local romantic scheme. The writer who wishes to do the love story of adventure will arrange to have Boy meet Girl as they pass each other midair in parachutes; as they come upon each other bobbing about in the sea after a steamship wreck; as they are caught in a landslide or great fire or a flood on the Yangtze; as they cross each other's trails as spies in an international intrigue; as one rescues the other from an eager lion or an equally eager group of carnivorous natives in darkest Africa—nearly any excuse (and this is no exag-

geration), fantastically coincidental though it be (provided, of course, that it is possible and thrilling enough), will do for most romantic readers.

If, on the other hand, the "local" love story is to be done, the author will fix upon a fairly familiar rural or urban scene. Boy may save Girl in a pasture from the charge of a bull (bucolic romance); or Boy may meet Girl by stumbling over her late in the evening at a prolonged cocktail party (sophisticated romance). Between these extremes, almost anything goes: bumping into each other at street corners; sitting beside each other in the park; mixing up each other's mail at the post office; calling the wrong number on the telephone . . . just make Boy meet Girl.

If any one of the introductions mentioned above seems to be drawing the long bow, I suggest that you select at random one of the popular magazines—from slicks to pulps—from the spectrum spread across your nearest magazine stand, and read for yourself; drop into the nearest movie and see for yourself; tune in a radio story and listen to the way Boy meets Girl in the ether.

And, after all, if the two must soon or late be brought together in the conventional love story, why not through any of the above contact devices? The skillfulness of forcing Boy and Girl together for an introductory meeting will depend only upon the quality of the magazine. The formula itself will not change.

If Boy is presented first in the story, sometime before reaching Page 5 of the manuscript, the author must promise or threaten the appearance of Girl. This promise may be made by direct announcement or vague implication. But there should not be left in the mind of the reader any doubt that there *is* a Girl whom Boy will

presently meet. Naturally enough, immediately that promise is given, the reader knows the end of the story, but, as explained in a previous paragraph, he prefers to pretend that Boy will not get Girl at the conclusion of the struggle.

The second step may become a bit involved. Once Boy has met Girl (or—need we repeat?—Girl has met Boy), a number of different choices are presented to the author, all of which, however, have but one end in view—to prove that Boy *wants* Girl. This is done: (1) by the direct approach. Boy announces that he wants Girl and will get her at all costs. The complications from this point on depend upon the author's patience and imagination. (2) By Boy's announcing very definitely that he *doesn't* want Girl; that he will not, in fact, have Girl under any circumstances. This attemptedly sly procedure on the part of the author seems very satisfactory to the average love-story addict. He tries hard to make believe that Boy really means it. (3) Boy is indifferent to and unconscious of Girl, an attitude which seems to please the reader almost as much as the previous scheme.

And what is Girl doing all this time? In our first choice of methods, two possibilities are open to Girl. Recognizing that Boy wants her, she may turn, in perversity, to insist that she cannot tolerate Boy. This challenge Boy must take up instantly and spend the remainder of the story meeting successfully. Or, Girl may want Boy as much as Boy wants Girl, but some force placed between the two will prevent them from getting each other until the conclusion of the narrative. This force may be the conventional, interfering stock parents of either, a disagreeable employer, war, pestilence, famine, natural cataclysm, or any other temporarily insuperable difficulty. But note,

please, that the difficulty must not be *too* insuperable, or, if it is, it must, at worst, be distinctly temporary, because, you remember, Boy *has* to get Girl eventually. Under method (2) when Boy adopts the attitude that he cannot possibly stand Girl, Girl's determination is, of course, that she will get Boy, willy-nilly. We then watch Boy seem to fight off Girl through the remainder of the yarn, to succumb, finally, with grudging geniality.

When, by our third method, Boy is discovered to be indifferent to Girl—that is, he really wants Girl but is such an unconscious person that he doesn't realize it or see her for the appealing creature she is—then several procedures are available: (1) Girl may act indifferent to Boy to fire his enthusiasm, or (2) Girl may pursue Boy temporarily; or (3) Girl may become distinctly hateful. Even so, Girl must always eventually become too agressively likable to be resisted by the reader. Whatever practice is followed, it should be made clear to the reader that Boy does really want Girl, and Girl really insists upon having Boy at long last.

The third major unit in the love story is concerned with the details of the actual chase. In other words, through some combination of circumstances, depending upon the author's inventiveness, Boy must lose Girl. He may lose her temporarily to another man; he may lose her by the machinations of the villain or villains of the piece; he may lose her through the agency of any number of separating forces. This section of the story constitutes the important suspense element. It should be worked out on at least a two-to-one basis, which means that for every time he seems about to get Girl, he should lose her twice.

The "cat-and-mouse" scheme of suspense has two particular demands. First, that every scene be completely

credible (if not probable); and, second, that the scenes be not spun out to the point of discouraging the reader whose patience will only hold when he is reasonably certain that Boy will, sometime soon, get Girl.

The fourth and concluding unit in the love story is, of course, the triumph of the hero. Tersely phrased, this means that Boy *does* get Girl. The final scene asks that the following points be satisfied: (1) That the action be brief. (2) That no unsolved problems remain. (3) That there be no question about Boy's having won Girl *completely*. And, therefore (4), that they will live happily ever after. The movies have learned to handle this scene with increasing terseness. Boy and Girl are catapulted into each other's arms, and, while the audience is still breathless, the picture fades into blackness. The radio manages this with what is called a fast "up-music," which, in its sweep of triumph, is calculated to dispel in the minds of the listeners any question about Boy's getting Girl. Book and magazine stories have come more and more to a brief concluding paragraph or whip-sentence of dialogue or exposition which, weak as it almost always is (for all the author's attempt to strengthen it with humor, riposte, or an O. Henry turnabout), assures the reader that Boy really does get Girl and that happiness will follow the couple thereafter.

The conventional love story is, in other words, an excellent example of the objective narrative of success. It must have, as has been pointed out, some sort of happy ending, else it will be denied admission to most magazines. It need not depend upon realistic truth for its appeal; it need not depend upon dull fact to be convincing. It needs, fundamentally, only to cling to its three-word action-pattern: union—disunion—reunion.

III. THE WESTERN STORY

THE Western story is, of course, simply a division of that great, general class of fast-action, outdoor fiction loosely categorized as "adventure" stuff. For two reasons, however, a separate discussion of the Western story is necessary: (1) it is the only yarn restricted in its setting to eleven of the forty-eight States; (2) it is the only kind of story which seems to have sufficient reader-appeal to fill, to the exclusion of every other type of yarn, the entire tables of contents of more than forty different magazines a month. Not even the love story—much less the detective-mystery tale—can boast such an audience. Thus for the purpose of this analysis the Western story will be hereafter treated, arbitrarily, as a distinct short story type which requires for its satisfactory creation special equipment and consideration from the writer.

The Western story falls into one of two classifications: the yarn of the old West and that of the new. Magazines which publish Westerns exclusively prefer tales of the old West but have within the last five years been letting down the bars to modern, even contemporary material. This up-to-date Western is acceptable—other things being equal—only when it is quite evidently motivated by the old Western traditions of virility, devil-may-care courage, shrewd humor, common sense, and chivalry. The narrative of the old West will probably always be more popular because of its historical appeal, its colorfulness, its terrific action, and its high moral and ethical values. (It is really worth speculating about, this latter fact that, except for the confession story, the Western yarn

preaches more of the solid virtues—and more blatantly—than even the children's fiction in Sunday school magazines. The would-be author of Western stories would do well to keep this point preëminently in mind: editors demand it.

The formula for the Western narrative is much the same as it is for other commercial stories. In planning it, the author should remember that its fundamental feature is *action*, and that the lead of the yarn must do the following things: (1) present a colorful, interesting—not unusually—somewhat mysterious—character involved in a tense situation. The background should be hastily painted in and made clearly local—i.e., Texas, Wyoming, Nevada, etc. Western-story readers seem always to be well acquainted with these States and insist on knowing the locale, therefore, just as soon as possible. It makes them feel comfortable and at home.

After presenting the character in his situation against a proper background, the writer should next state (or imply), out of this situation, precisely what the purpose—the objective—of the story is to be. This need not be done in the second paragraph or even the fifth, but presently the reader must be told what the yarn is going to try to prove. The original situation, I have said, may have introduced the central character alone at grips with a grave problem. He may, for instance, be discovered at the moment his horse has stumbled and broken its leg, or has been taken sick of some strange illness, or has, perhaps, just been shot by a bullet from an unknown's gun. Or again, the character may be on foot, staggering toward Lonesome Gulch where an old uncle of his has recently died and left him a mine. The reader meets the hero at

the instant that he has drunk up the last drop of precious water in the old canteen and the desert still stretches miles and miles ahead in a maddening heat-shimmering mirage. A brief flashback after the introduction of the character will explain his presence here on the painted desert—lost, discouraged, fever-racked. Then the forward narrative picks up again and perhaps, at that moment, a stranger comes riding out of the trackless waste to succor our hero and so help him on to his destination. And oftener than not this stranger is thus able to learn of our hero's situation and so have the inside of the track when it comes to getting his clutches on Old Man Jepson's property which old Jepson never would sell while he was alive. And maybe when the pair get to Lonesome Gulch, they find a girl. She and our hero will look honestly into each other's eyes and see an answer there which will lend yet another purpose to our hero's determination. Now he *must* make a success out of running the old mine, confronted though he is by all the mysterious things that he hears happened there shortly before his uncle's rather peculiar death.

So it goes. The triangle works again. Here it is composed of the following elements: Angle A is the positive force—in other words, the young man; Angle B is the negative force, namely, the villain; Angle C is the force which constitutes the objective—i.e., the Jepson mine. The girl is simply an additional motivating figure. She is unnecessary. In many a Western she simply over-complicates the action. That she is definitely minor in interest here is proved by the fact that when the mine has been finally secured by the rightful owner, the story stops. The reader is permitted to take for granted that with the way now

cleared, our hero will likely marry the young lady and that they will settle down to become Lonesome Gulch's number one family.

You will observe that we started the story with a fast-moving or desperate involvement. We next stated the purpose. Next we transferred the temporarily opposing force in the triangle from the threat of the desert to the threat of the villainous character. We then brought our hero to the major setting of the tale and shortly introduced our additional motivating influence—the girl. Through her agency the hero learns of the peculiar circumstances of his uncle's death. The reader thus is able to classify properly the rôle which the villain is to play in the piece. Thereafter, we add complication to complication; we bring both our hero and the girl into dreadful straits time after time; we let the villain gain advantage after advantage until the reader just cannot see how the hero will ever get out of the terrific jam he has been placed in. And finally, we encourage the hero whose potentialities have been regularly promised to be great enough to meet successfully the last and really climactic encounter—we inspire our hero, through the girl and the mine, to combine strength, ingenuity, a rightful wrath, and true Western courage to extricate himself from the horrible predicament in which the villain has placed him. He then disposes satisfactorily of the villain, takes possession of the mine, and, as the author suggests, not unlikely marries the girl as quickly as they can get to the justice's.

Do not miss the point. Whether the story deals with a mine or a cattle ranch, sheep or cows, Mexicans or Indians, its basic scheme is the same. The Western is the narrative of sweep and vigor; of strong men against the

majestic background of Nature; of hot tempers and high spirits; of pioneers with a harsh rough code which has the word "Right" as its determining factor. The deserving weak must be saved; the oppressed released from their bondage; all subversive forces destroyed and the name "American" apotheosized to become the symbol of everything worth while. This is no story to be written by anyone who does not thoroughly believe in the fundamental principles for which our country stands and upon which it has been created. It is the tale best told by a person who honestly accepts and wishes to aggrandize the colorful stuff of the history of these United States in the formative days of the old West. He can, if he wills it, inspire himself and others with this perennially exciting, stirring narrative.

But here is the catch. You or anyone else may be able to write a splendid story—looked at merely from the standpoint of fiction construction—and still can fail as a Western-story writer. Why? Because few authors are willing to steep themselves so fully in American history and folklore as must the Western writer. The really successful Western yarn-spinner never takes a chance on his background and his facts. He doesn't mix up Kit Carson with Billy the Kid or Jesse James with Wild Bill Hickox. He knows better than to place a copper mine in a silver-mining area; to show sheep-herders and cattlemen living in perpetual peace. He doesn't put an automatic in the gambler's hand in the days even before the old Colt came into standard use. He really does, therefore, know the difference between a derringer and a horse-pistol, a Mauser and a flintlock. He knows the uplands where the mountain lions slink and he is quite familiar

with the locale and habits of the diamond-back. Above all, he never writes dialogue so that the died-in-the-wool Westerner sounds like a Southerner with adenoids or a Yankee with a new vocabulary of such words as "podner," "Injuns," "yaller dust," and the like. More than all that, this Western-story writer whose tales are read 'round the world has a conscience which keeps him forever on the lookout for rare historical facts of the old days. He seldom repeats himself. He usually has a better library of Americana than the author whose stuff appears in the quality magazines.

Don't try Westerns unless you are willing to do plenty of work for what you will get—and you will usually get a cent or two a word. When you write a straight adventure tale or a bit of detectifiction, or possibly a love story, you are not tampering with American history. When you attempt the yarn of the days when the West was young—or later, when it was older, you must face both a social and academic responsibility which is a grave one. If you can take it, then the millions of Western-story readers will open their hearts to you. But if you think you can scamp the job and get away with it, the editors and the readers of at least forty magazines will give you a beating you'll never forget.

(See Unit Eight of this book—Francis W. Hilton's essay on the Western Story.)

IV. THE DETECTIVE STORY

THE detective story has three different markets—pulp, slick, and, to a limited extent, quality publications. But for any or all of these markets, the crime detection yarn has, fundamentally, only one set of rules. To attempt to explain these "rules" results in a peculiar but practical combination of positive and negative advice with the emphasis upon the latter. Which is to say that magazine and book editors feel that they are better acquainted with what their readers not only don't want, but won't have than they are with what they are sure their readers will enjoy.

Because of this situation every author intending to write a piece of detectifiction should first outline it, then apply to this outline (1) the "taboo" or negative tests, then (2) the constructive or positive tests. Unless the author feels honestly that his outline has passed both of these test standards with a very high grade, he should not try to go ahead with the narrative. The reason? Something above one-fourth of all the fiction readers in the United States devote themselves to this kind of tale and they represent a pretty hard-boiled gang of critics. They resent the loosely-constructed yarn, the credulity-straining tale, and the puppet-character story. The writer cannot get away with half-baked, carelessly-motivated stuff; his job is to do three special things: (1) provide a crime and criminal important enough to make the solution worth while, (2) a detective whom the reader can respect and be pleased with as he unravels the crime and tracks down the criminal and (3) a solution which not

only leaves nothing unsolved but is arrived at skillfully, plausibly, and, above all, satisfactorily. These three corner stones in our triangular detective edifice will hold up, if necessary, any other weakness in the plot structure. But be warned that the slightest plot weakness will thin the yarn so that it may give the whole tale a "feel" of unimportance. Hence preparation—long and honest preparation—is required to do this kind of narrative with anything like success.

But let us examine the outline of the negative advice for detective-story writers. The following points are set down without regard to order since there are too many approaches to the tale of detection to permit discussing the variations.

1. The story, under ordinary circumstances, must not be written from the point of view of the criminal. Thus the reader should not be allowed to dip into his mind under any conditions. Naturally if the yarn is done from the criminal's angle, then the sympathy of the reader will be with him because the reader will be privy to all his thought and actions. The suspense in such a case will be concerned with the criminal's escape rather than with the detective's skill in tracking him down.

2. The criminal should not be a person unworthy of the detective's steel. It is no satisfaction either to the detective or the reader to be in on the capture of a stupid animal who by the sheer force of circumstances has managed to elude his pursuer until the end of the story.

3. Supernatural agencies are not permitted either to start, continue, or conclude the story. Time was when the author who couldn't think of a beginning or solution would drag in loup-garous, trolls, unexplained phantom figures,

and a whole flock of other hocus-pocus creatures of the imagination to chill, thrill, and confuse the reader. Then the author would leave the reader without a further explanation beyond the announcement that these forces because of what they are, get away with everything anyhow and there's no use trying to find out why.

4. Father Ronald Knox says that no more than one secret room, secret passage, and secret panel should be permitted to a detective story. He argues that the multiplication of mysterious mechanisms is recognized presently by the reader simply as a device to conceal the fact that the criminal himself is not an especially impressive person and must accordingly be surrounded by such junk to give him character.

5. Knox also believes that no Chinese—sinister or otherwise—should appear in the tale. His feeling is that the Oriental has had most of his mystery and menace stripped from him during the last few decades and, therefore, has become a stock actor who is rather tiresome to all concerned.

6. Time was when it was good technique to follow a detective through his innumerable writhings and twistings in and about the plot only to reveal him at long last as the murderer he has been trying to catch. Either readers are smarter these days or the device has been used too often, because editors now refuse with great enthusiasm any yarn that hinges for its "wow!" upon such a trick.

7. The detective is not to be permitted strange intuitions and unaccountable hunches. He is not to be aided by accident or other coincidence. He must, in other words, stick fairly close to the demands of real life in the detecting world and must thus work out his solution

as a fallible human being whose only advantage is a special interest and skill in his various activities.

8. If the "Watson" point of view is adopted as the telling medium, the thoughts, schemes, and information which this friend of the detective possesses must become completely the property of the reader with no hold-outs along the way.

9. Although Oppenheim and a few other top-flight writers have got away with twins or doubles both among the criminals and the detectives, such obvious attempts at obfuscating the reader on the one hand and aiding the writer's flagging imagination on the other must be ruled out as amateur business. The reader nearly always feels badly cheated when he discovers that this once-popular mechanism has been dragged out of the moth-balls.

10. No character not mentioned or shown in the early part of the story may emerge at the end as the criminal. This is one of the most frequently made errors of the beginning writer who probably starts his yarn not knowing himself who the criminal is and is forced later to manufacture one in order to polish off the thing at all.

11. The contemporary reader is getting fed-up with the bacteriologist from the University of Chicago or the specialist in tropical fish from the New York Museum as a masterful scientific detective who befogs the entire scene with all sorts of obscure allusions, polysyllabic terminology, and other nonsense. And this, of course, simply to impress the audience with his authority. Lately editors have been welcoming with a sigh of happiness a few straightforward, unscientific crime detectors who are willing to work along the reader's level without the aid of Ph.D.'s and other phony titles.

12. The urban scene is always overdone by detecti-fictioneers, probably because the city seems to offer more chance for complications. I doubt that metropolitan crimes are any more interesting than suburban or rural crimes, and from what I have been able to gather from editors during the past decade, I find that they would actually prefer settings outside the city and more, therefore, within the experience of the average reader.

13. The writer must not overdetail the circumstances which follow the capturing of the criminal. The explanation of the methodology of the crime and its solution is nearly always anticlimactical. It must therefore cover the ground adequately but with whirlwind briskness. I suggest that this section of the story never be more than three pages long. One page, if it is possible, will be more satisfactory to the reader.

14. More than three murders—including the initial killing—should not be permitted. It is all well and good to pop off scores of actors just to increase the mystery and frighten your reader by the thought that at the rate the characters are being used up, he himself had better look out. But the laws of reader-psychology dictate that one killing is really enough for a murder mystery; two is company, and three is certainly a mob.

The outline of the positive advice to be given the beginning detective story-writer is rather more difficult to come at. There is, evidently, much of it implicit in the foregoing list of taboos, but the following suggestions show at least the minimum essentials of the tale aimed at the commercial market.

1. Practically every pulp-paper and slick-paper magazine in the country starts its list of fundamental de-

tectifiction "do's" with the demand: "Make it fast-moving, modern, and credible."

2. The hero should be likable, intelligent, young—if there's to be girl interest (always played down in this type of fiction); older, if two of the other principals (boy and girl) are to be brought together upon the unraveling of the crime.

3. The purpose of the detective story is two-fold: (a) to demonstrate the powers of the detective, and (b) to show that crime does not pay. This latter point is currently being belabored by such pulps as *G-Men*, *The Feds*, *Public Enemy*, *Black Mask*, etc. But the first purpose is far more important.

4. The victims of the criminals should be decent people and of some standing in the community. The yarn of one rat wiping out another may be interesting but it has less reality and value to the reader than the story of trouble involving people like himself.

5. Backgrounds (to coincide with the suggestion above) must not be sordid, gloomy, and depressing. Thus it is not necessary for the majority of the scenes to occur at night so that an atmosphere of mystery can be played up. The best backgrounds either of day or night are those with which everyone is immediately familiar and with which the reader can readily identify himself.

6. Sex appears only palely in the detective story. Some of the magazines will accept a yarn with the love element very much subordinated—usually relegated to someone other than the detective, but the point to be made usually in the crime story is to detect the criminal, not to work out a romance. Clearly enough sex is better left to the sex magazines than sneaked in here.

7. Full motivation of every incident in the detective story is absolutely demanded. No actor should do or think anything which does not have the motive well-indicated and substantiated. Cheap authors often drag in unmotivated material to help out solutions much as the Greeks in the ancient plays brought down a god from a machine to explain something which was clearly beyond the normal possibility of the actors on the stage. Characters and action, therefore, must have an excuse for being or they should be eliminated. No wire-pulled puppets have a place in crime fiction.

8. It is better either to work out the story from your imagination or from old police files than to take a current front page story and create the yarn from that. There are too many persons just waiting for a chance to re-write today's headlines under the impression that that is being timely. Actually, the reader feels cheated to find his news done into fiction.

9. The crime which acts as the *raison d'être* of the narrative should either have been committed just before the story starts or before the fifth manuscript page has been reached. Since the reader knows that he is reading a crime story, he wants to discover the crime as soon as possible. This is not to be understood, however, as recommending that the story start off with the ringing of the telephone on the captain's desk in Precinct No. 9 and a voice announcing that someone has just been murdered at the corner of Green Street and Aspirin Avenue. Some subtlety can be used; some small restraint certainly must be. The most successful detective tales introduce a character, give him a setting, orient the reader generally, then spring the crime. Thereafter complication mounts on

complication and our detective begins methodically to collect his clues, analyze characters, and try to fit the jigsaw puzzle together with cool and assured skill. The good writer no longer throws suspicion upon everybody in the entire community in order to conceal from the reader the obvious criminal. On the contrary, if his characters have been properly selected and motivated, he will be able to present the few logically suspicious persons without playing the reader false and wasting the detective's time.

The would-be writer of detective and mystery stories should test *himself* before he attempts them. If he is not especially interested in this form of fiction, he is almost sure to fail in writing it. He must be a voracious reader of detective stories; he must follow crimes in the daily papers—not to copy them but to familiarize himself with the methodology of detection; he must keep a file of crime "angles" and, above all, he must be able to construct and reconstruct with the same swift facility he gives his detective.

This writing of crime narratives is no simple business, and unless the author is willing to give it far more time and thought and ingenuity than he gives to most other fiction forms, he had better turn to the love story or articles on bee-keeping or some other less arduous form of exercise and skilled labor.

UNIT THREE

CREATING JUVENILE FICTION

I. THE JUVENILE FIELD AS A TRAINING GROUND

THE juvenile field is often considered as a ground school from which writers, after a period of practice in producing literature for boys and girls, can soar into the higher altitudes of literature for men and women. There is some reason for this belief, both in theory and in fact, but the pen skillfully manipulated for juveniles does not always seem to work so well up there among the adults. The reverse also is true. Writers who hit it off well among readers who have reached the age of sophistication frequently make a very poor job of it and sometimes even crack up the typewriter when they attempt to land among immature readers. Of course, the really gifted writer—gifted with natural ability and with capacity for hard work—usually succeeds in both fields, as Stevenson and Kipling did. But there is no certainty about it.

I remember an experiment which didn't work very well. I thought it would be good for the juvenile magazine which I was editing to have a number of stories by writers who had distinctly "arrived"; and so, as a starter, I arranged with an author of national reputation among adults to write a series of stories for us. I suspect that he looked upon this assignment as a relaxation from his regular chore of turning out stories for a famous weekly. The first bit of fiction this famous author sent me was fair, the second perhaps little less than fair, the third distinctly poor. In reading those three stories you could easily detect the man's ability as a writer; in judging

them as stories for boys, you could plainly see his misconception of the field.

On the other hand, I now and then have that very pleasant experience of spotting a "comer." On my desk I may find a story which, in addition to being admirably adapted to boy readers, has something in it that suggests the author's power to go far in almost any direction he wishes to go. I look at the name—as yet unheralded. A little time passes and the unknown arrives. His short stories are accepted by the best magazines, his first novel scores a success, and the editor who first "discovered" him (or who fancies he discovered him) pats himself on the back and says to himself, "Aha, didn't I tell you!"

A generation or two ago the juvenile field was something more of a training school than it is today. Young persons were not quite so sophisticated as they are now. There was not so much reading matter. Movies and the radio exerted no influence. School methods were different. The boys and girls, small and big, were much more inclined to accept what was given to them without question or criticism. Many excellent stories were being written for children in those days as anyone who read *The Youth's Companion*, *Harper's Young People*, and *St. Nicholas* will tell you. In fact, not a few writers who have left their imprint upon American literature made their start with those three papers. The magazine field was not so wide as it is today. The number of publications in the whole list was scarcely as great as the number of new ones that are born every year in these times. New writers turned to the "juveniles" as one of the best markets for their manuscripts, and they usually wrote with an eye on the adults, for they well knew that the fathers and mothers read those magazines from cover to cover.

If you turn back, however, to those pages now yellowing and softened by the enhancing patina of time, you may heave a romantic sigh on behalf of bygone days, but you will admit, I am sure, that the structure of those old bits of fiction was, in the main, very simple. You will also observe that there was a distinct tendency to "write down" to the youthful audience (in spite of the fact that the adult readers always sat up close in the background). You may also, if you permit yourself to criticize, discover that many of the stories—even those which carry famous names beneath their titles—were obviously the groping attempts of beginners. You will notice, too, that certain types of stories recur so often as to suggest an insistent demand from the readers.

The Youth's Companion, for example, printed hundreds of "short adventures." For years never an issue of that much-loved weekly appeared without one of these little stories. The length was only 2,000 to 2,200 words. Almost no attempt at characterization was made. The more or less youthful hero was introduced, as quickly as the writer could contrive, into a situation of extreme danger. He was a steeple jack about to fall from a spire two hundred feet above the ground; he was a pioneer chased by a score of blood-thirsty Apaches; a woodsman caught in his own bear trap. Through two or three columns of type he struggled valiantly in the crisis; somehow he managed, without outside help, to retie the rope cut by the sharp edge of the cornice, to outrun or outwit the Apaches, to file apart the steel jaws that held him. Once he was safe on the ground, secure among the mountains, or on his way back to his cabin, he dropped from sight and the juvenile reader knew him no more.

The writer who could master this simple formula and

had at his command a suitable variety of adjectives and adverbs connoting and denoting excitement, danger, suspense, could turn out these short adventures just about as rapidly as he could think of situations. It is a type of story now almost extinct, like its companion—the story with the highly obvious moral, a lesson in fiction form, which exists rarely today even among Sunday School magazines.

I am not attempting to belittle the value or literary merit of those magazines of yesterday. They occupied positions of importance and performed a great service. Relatively, they shone more brightly than the juvenile magazines of today.

In their successors, the places of these old favorite forms of fiction are taken by stories more sophisticated, developed further in characterization, built around plots of greater complexity. Some time ago a writer, who had made the grade with the pulp-paper magazines, said to me, after he had listened to the reasons for the rejection of his last three submitted stories! "I think I see now what you want. I mustn't 'write down.' Situations mustn't be too wild. I can't even get away with some of the things that those news stand magazines accept. You want plausibility, a closely knit plot, more character work, and, yes, I know, plenty of action." And then he added, "It isn't so simple as I thought it was. I really believe it's harder to write for boys than it is for adults."

In many ways it *is* harder. When we undertake to write for adults, we are writing for ourselves; when we attempt to write for boys, we are doing more even than writing for ourselves as we used to be—we are trying to write for ourselves as we would have been if we had been boys to-

day. There are, of course, some fundamental verities about youth which do not change with changing years. Its thoughts will always be long, long thoughts. But Johnny Simmons at the age of fifteen today, living in Boston or Pasadena or Perkins Corner, is likely to devote those long, long thoughts, in part at least, to ideas and subjects which did not occupy the mind of his father, Billy Simmons, in any of those places in 1900 or 1910.

Recently I returned an excellent story to its author. The three boy characters were well drawn; they lived in action and conversation; the plot was adequate; the climax satisfying. Particularly good was the author's handling of the emotions of his young hero. My reason for rejection was simply that I was convinced that this particular story would fall flat with our magazine audience of 'teen-age boys. The emotions of the young hero were those of boys not yet in their 'teens. In writing to the author, I said: "We believe that the two groups which would find the strongest interest in your story are the younger boys from eight to twelve and the adults who like to look behind them at their youth." Back came the author's acknowledgment: "Your criticism hits the spot right enough. I realize that the story was aimed at a juvenile market which long ago died of sophistication."

That isn't quite all of it. If this story which I am using as an example were given to an audience composed of small boys and their fathers, I believe that the youngsters' interest would be completely captivated by the action alone, whereas the adults' interest would be centered in the emotional experiences of the three heroes. One group would say: "Gee, I'd like to do that." The other would say: "That writer surely does understand boy psychology."

It is something more than a matter of sophistication. If we are right in our analysis of our boys, they are more objective than subjective in their point of view. Introspection grows upon human beings with the passage of the years. Of course, you will occasionally find instances of extreme introspection even among young children, but the average or normal boy looks outward more than inward, and—what is equally important for the writer to know who wishes to work in the juvenile field—he looks ahead oftener than behind. Like a trout he is forever heading upstream.

Therefore we always reject the story written in the manner of one looking back at his youth and keenly, fondly, or humorously dissecting boyhood emotions, even when the action is strong and the long, long thoughts are skillfully revealed. And we always consider carefully whether, *from the point of view of the boy himself*, the story is looking backward or forward.

To make this point clearer: If the editor of a boys' magazine determines that the average age of his audience is fifteen years, he will, as a general rule, avoid those stories in which boys of less than fifteen play a prominent part, and will favor those in which the heroes are above that age. He will avoid analysis of boyhood psychology, but that does not mean by any means that he will shun emotion. He will be glad to find that quality in the stories submitted to him, but he will make sure that the emotional experiences of the heroes who appear in his magazine are not those which his audience believes at the moment are left behind forever. Few if any of us start looking back to our childhood until we have reached maturity and have encountered the struggle of life; then only are we

ready to glance to the rear and weave romance about our early days.

So there are some difficulties in writing for boys that are not encountered in writing for their fathers, and the same is true in writing for girls as compared with writing for their mothers.

When the author or would-be author asks me if it isn't good training to write for the juvenile field, I must in all honesty answer: if by "training" you mean preparation for the adult field, it's no better than starting right out with stories for grown-ups. And you may find it harder to write for Jack and Ruth than you do to write for their parents; to no small degree it depends on whether you understand the present reading tastes of boys and girls as well as you do the present reading tastes of fathers and mothers.

—Clayton Holt Ernst.

II. ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN

PEOPLE are always talking about what children *do* like or *should* like to read, as though children were an entirely different species from themselves. One would scarcely guess to hear them that everyone of us has actually been a child. But for the writer of juvenile books this is the central fact, the core of the whole matter. He writes (if he is worth his salt) primarily for the child he himself once was. I would go further than that and say that the person who writes good children's books is the one who retains within himself certain strong elements of his own childhood, unchanged in spite of their being overlaid by layers of adultness. Unless one is stirred to a child's absorbed delight by a subject, one had better not write about it for children. They are the first to recognize that the spirit is not there, that the book is mechanical and, therefore, dull. The source of Rachel Field's and Dorothy Lathrop's enchanting *Hitty* was the doll Hitty herself who won their hearts from a New York shop window long before they made a book about her. Anne Parrish wrote and illustrated her lovely *Floating Island* primarily to amuse and distract herself in a time of worry and household illness. The man who writes well about engines or airplanes is one who has watched them at their exact and tremendous work for years with a child's absorption.

Once given the spring of interest—the doll in the shop window; the skin-clad water carrier leaning over in the dusty gold of a Marrakesh sunset to give a cup of water to a performing ape and dog (the reason for *Toutou in*

Bondage being written); a newspaper clipping telling of some hitherto unknown tribe living in an African crater—given the impetus appealing to the child-element in the author, it will require all his powers as an adult to shape that impetus wisely and beautifully. At this stage he touches the central idea, turns it from side to side, looks at it from this angle or that angle. Characters begin to form in his mind, a plot shapes itself. At some time during this process he decides for what age the new book is intended, not calculating probably in the two-year periods some bookseller's affect, but quite simply as either for very little children, for older children, or for children in their teens. Fundamentally, it will be for children who love the subject he has chosen, and the absolute age will stretch a good deal for the sake of this subject.

Then comes the matter of length, which will be largely determined by the richness of the idea and the age of the children who are to read it, for no one would think of writing a novel-length book for children of nursery-rhyme age, whereas one might well do so if writing for children in their teens. (I confess in this matter to playing occasional arbitrary games, like planning nine chapters for a cat book to correspond with the nine lives of a cat—but this is probably a personal idiosyncrasy.)

The method of handling the plot will be much like that in an adult book, though on simpler lines. There is an exceedingly well-written book by an Italian author, Teresah, which begins with the unjust arrest of an assistant in a Nuremberg toyshop. The plot concerns the efforts of the toys and the storks to right the wrong, a direct appeal to the enormous sense of justice which is one of the strongest characteristics of most children. If possible, an author

does well to choose some broadly human theme for his plot motif, of which virtue in distress (the Cinderella theme in every possible variation) is perhaps the most perennially successful. There should be suspense, yet nothing too involved for a child's mind to follow readily. As for the use of words, one should write simply, of course, but if an occasional less common word is necessary for meaning or beauty, no one should hesitate to use it. Almost all children take a collector's pleasure in the sound of new words, if they are not overwhelmed with too many at a time.

Another element to be considered is the natural conservatism of children. They do not require anything new in idea, although it must be so in detail. And with younger children nothing is more effective than repetition, the thing upon which all tribal chants and tales, ballads, and even the choruses of our modern popular songs are built. Robert Southey, working industriously among the ladies of his household in his dignified dwelling among the English lakes, little guessed that when his much-admired heroic poems should be all but forgotten, his nursery tale of *Goldilocks* would still be known to every child. And it has endured largely because of its perfect use of repetition—the three chairs, the three bowls of porridge, the three beds. No one has ever forgotten the inquiring voices of the three bears and the spell they wove.

Not only does repetition charm a child, but it serves also to build up form, just as it does in music. In *The Cat Who Went to Heaven* the repeated scene of the young Japanese artist seated on his mats in his bare room, meditating and then dipping his brush in spring water, touching it with ink, and drawing, served to hold the tale

together, to bind the illustrations integrally to the text, and to lead up with a sense of inevitability to the climax. I remember how charming repetition made Wanda Gäg's *Millions of Cats*, which Anne Carroll Moore always compared to a true folk tale. In a lesser degree, repetition helps to build up sentence structure, too, in stories for younger children.

Another question that often arises is how far fear and horror may be used in stories for children. I am not an extremist of either camp. Just as these elements are built into the imagination of the race from its earliest times, so I think they have a place in the development of the imagination of the individual child. But in reason, in reason! Children differ enormously in the effect upon them of anything gruesome. Some mothers will know that their children are too easily haunted by old fairy tales, and will keep the more robust and terrible of them from their library shelves, while trying gradually—if they are wise—to harden by other means the fiber of their children's minds to meet the often grim realities of life. Other children will take such things in their stride and need no expurgated "Red Riding Hood." In the stories actually being written today, I think one should use fear if it appears necessary to the plot—who questions, for instance, the grotesque and rather horrible goblins whom Curdie encountered?—but there should be no touch of sadism. Terror may legitimately enter into a story, but it may not linger there and writhe.

Sometimes one deliberately introduces certain elements on order. In writing *The Boy with the Parrot*, I had been told by my publishers that children like to know the exact details of life in foreign countries: what the other

children wore and ate and played with. The impetus of the tale was my feeling for Guatemala itself—that delight was my own and native to me, untouched by any publisher. But I deliberately kept a careful notebook, jotting down lists of the produce on the backs of the carriers, the shapes of the sandals, in fact, all the clear outlines of life as I saw it. This material was easily handled in telling the story, but it very definitely shaped the form the story was cast in, and produced a certain sort of book, fulfilling its particular purpose, but predestined to be one of travel rather than a work of the imagination.

The Cat Who Went to Heaven was also laid in a foreign land, but in it Japan is only the screen before which I tried to show the drama of love and death and triumphant self-sacrifice in a form which might show them as beautiful.

For myself, I have found the use of poetry at the ends of chapters very pleasant. I don't know if Kipling invented this form, but certainly I first met it as a child in the *Jungle Books*. I have often been grateful to the discipline of poetry in training me in condensation of atmosphere and a sense of form. But different authors will use different methods, each shoemaker sticking to his own last.

So, in brief I would say—write from something that has really intrigued you, an idea or a glimpse that for the moment has completely fired your own imagination. Then you may be sure that your book will have at least a spark of life. To that add your plot, as simple and universal in its appeal as the situation will warrant, deciding meanwhile in a very general way to what age the book is to be addressed, and to what length it is to run. Most people at this point will make a tentative outline.

In the actual writing one need not fear the use of any words or ideas that may be inherent in the central theme, as long as these do not overstress the element of horror, or any other emotion usually considered not fit for children. The form must not be overlooked. In many cases, especially in books for younger children, repetition proves a powerful unifying thread, although there are many other methods. So, with delight as the heart of the tale, form for its skeleton, and plot for its music and flesh, your story is ready to begin its life.

And what about the life of a story? Which ones have continued to live? They must, of course, first appeal to the audience for which they were written—the children. But is that enough? I cast my mind back to the Rollo books or the Henty books, so beloved in their day and so soon forgotten. And then one's thoughts go to Andersen's *Fairy Tales*, *Alice in Wonderland*, or *Heidi*, running through its many editions. Booksellers say that the buyers are adults—a book must have a sales appeal to mothers and aunts. But parents bought the Rollo books and the Henty books in their time. And still the stories died. No, I think that the secret is perhaps that a book must have power to appeal to a child, first, and then be of such a nature that that child does not outgrow it; that the man who read Jules Verne as a boy may casually pick up his son's copy of *Twenty Leagues under the Sea* and find it hard to lay down; that the girl who loved the *Tanglewood Tales* may read them to her children and think, "Really, how beautiful they are!" When a book is not outgrown in middle age by those who read it first as children, it has a chance, at least, of becoming a classic.

—ELIZABETH COATSWORTH.

III. BUILDING THE JUVENILE SERIAL

TOO infrequently do writers of juvenile fiction recognize that the multiple-part story for boys and girls ten to sixteen years old demands a machinery and technique peculiarly its own. The serial is *not* a long short story. It is not precisely a junior novel. It has qualities of both and certain features of neither. While a junior novel may lend itself to successful magazine serialization, a serial, paradoxically enough, does not always do so well between boards. By cautious editorial proportioning, a book may be broken up, without reference to chapter divisions, into satisfactory serial installments, but if the process be reversed and a story written primarily for magazine publication has its parts assembled to form a book, the results are not always so happy. As opposed to the well-integrated and smooth-flowing junior novel, the book serial has, among other difficulties, the awkwardness of moving through sharply demarcated dramatic units, each apparently almost complete in itself. In other words, when the story is published as a book the installment divisions still show. This single fact suggests a fundamental difference between the serial and the junior novel. A thoughtful examination of the multiple-part story brings to light other individual characteristics which imply that the serial may be, after all, a specialized fiction form and as such demand specialized treatment and technique.

Serial subjects are little different from those employed in the long story and the junior novel. They must lend

themselves easily to the graphic presentation of a problem or situation which is intrinsically important and worth while to young readers. An investigation of the subjects that youngsters enjoy most has brought to light the following list arranged in order of popularity: adventure, mystery, athletics, sports, animals, mechanics, and business, with sentimental romance and character tales trailing far behind. Most juvenile magazines prefer their stories to be done either for boys or girls. The double audience of the old *Youth's Companion* no longer exists. The sex story is, of course, taboo—even as a light romance. The character story, as such, is not popular with the youth of today. The preachy, obviously didactic yarn usually strangles itself with its long, sanctimonious tentacles. While every well-written juvenile serial should possess character-building qualities—courage, perseverance, loyalty, honor, good sportsmanship—they must never be placarded or flaunted in the reader's face.

Suppose the writer has chosen one of these previously mentioned subjects—what then? His next job is to determine the theme or purpose of his narrative. Theme may be defined as the germ, the substance, the basic story idea or objective. Out of it the tale develops in terms of characters, setting, action, and atmosphere. It is a truism to say that the theme should be arrestingly different, but it somehow must be forever repeated that those serials which build great reputations for their authors have, significantly, a marked individuality. The yarn with a new twist of personality, an unusual angle of emotional appeal, a novel or ingenious method of presentation is frequently found to owe its success to the originality of its fundamental idea—*the theme.*

With the subject in hand and the *raison d'être* of the serial crystallized in the theme, the writer next determines the plot-scheme he is to follow. "Plot" is, after all, merely the pattern or design of the story, and depends pretty much upon the nature of the theme. In the character tale, the plot may be extremely simple, since the incidents themselves which prove or test the character of the chief actor form only part of the principal interest. The character's reactions to the incidents, rather, make the story. In the mystery tale, the plot must be intricately and skillfully wrought, with the reader's attention constantly focussed upon the continuity of the perfectly-fitting units that make up the design of the problem with its solution. Character, as such, in this sort of yarn is generally subordinated to dramatic incident and atmospheric effect.

Thus far the serial has points in common with other fiction forms almost exactly. While plot is being considered, we come to the first of the serial's special characteristics. The story must be considered both as an entity and as a series of dramatic units. Each of these units should conclude with something which may be called a dramatic "teaser," a note of suspense, or promise that will encourage the reader to keep his interest properly simmering until the next week's or month's unit arrives. The installment ends upon an unresolved crisis, the completion of which is withheld for the opening of the following chapter. Most juvenile magazines use a summary of previous installments to introduce successive ones. These are usually office-written. Sometimes, however, the "Story So Far" plan is not employed, and one of two methods is followed: in a brief paragraph or an introductory sentence or two the author catches up the situation as the previous

installment has left it and the yarn then plunges forward. Or in some magazines the review may be completely omitted, and thus the reader is encouraged to buy back numbers to find out what has happened.

As a result of the serial's being divided into dramatic units, it has a tempo peculiarly its own. Each installment is built very much like a single short story, insofar as mechanical elements are concerned. Every unit has, therefore, an individual pace which must not alone reflect the rhythm of the events immediately at hand, but also fit into the tempo scheme of the entire story. Generally the serial moves much more rapidly than the junior novel. Not only do its installments have within themselves a swiftly rising action, but the complete tale gives an impression of progressing with an increasing celerity toward a sure conclusion.

Characterization in the serial is a matter to receive special attention. Since more actors take part in the multiple-part tale than in the short story, there appears the problem of drawing each of them sharply enough to give them individuality. The junior novel has time to do this gradually and fully. Infrequently of book-length, the serial must sketch its principals with a kind of careful haste, accentuating predominant characteristics so that the reader's memory may retain a sharp picture of the actors over the intervening week or month. The serial uses only absolutely necessary characters and keeps them constantly employed. The writer must be careful that the hero (or heroine) is never lost sight of. Even if this principal character must temporarily be physically out of the picture, the story should not fail to make clear that it continues to be about him that the narrative is woven.

Setting and atmosphere must be handled without an overloading of detail or repetition. There is no skimping of necessities, but wandering and over-adjectived static scene pictures break the required lift of a forward-moving tale. Do not misunderstand these suggestions. Character, setting, and atmosphere are not to be done in a haphazard, slash-of-pen manner. The serial does not race forward so rapidly that it must neglect artistry or subtlety. It is to the junior novel what the well-done motion picture is to the portrait in oils. Many of the details flash by almost unnoticed, but the significance of the whole is unmistakable.

Russell Gordon Carter, creator of a score or more of boys' books, of innumerable serials and short stories, author of the prize-winning junior novel of a few years ago, *Three Points of Honor*, and of other juvenile tales, makes the following comment on the serial:

"The chief difference between the junior novel and the juvenile serial, as I understand the two types, appears to be a matter of breadth and fullness. The novel is a thing of bone and sinew and flesh; the serial has little more than the bone and sinew. 'For the sake of action,' says the magazine editor, 'let the flesh go! We do better without it.' And the flesh does go! It is either left off in the writing or, if the story happens to have been written for book publication, it is stripped off in the revision.

"Novels of mine, printed as serials, have been thoroughly stripped of their flesh. At the command of editors I myself have sometimes done the stripping. Just what do we mean by 'flesh'? The flesh of a novel, as I see it, is that part which can be removed without hindering the working out of plot. It may consist of dialogue, descrip-

tion, characterization, historical background, unessential action.

"Several years ago, in a published article, I ventured the following observation: 'Any story that is interesting enough to make a good book is interesting enough to serialize.' That is a radical statement, and I am aware that few editors will agree with it; but it was my belief during the half-dozen years that I served on the editorial staff of a juvenile magazine, and, broadly speaking, it is my belief now. Looking back over those half-dozen years, I recall that the most popular serials we printed were the ones that were written naturally, as novels are written. Some of them appeared between covers afterward. I think the reason for their popularity was this: although most of them had to be cut to fit space, they were stories of breadth and fullness, and were not dependent largely upon action for interest. They had their leisurely moments. In short, they had bone and sinew *and* flesh.

"I appreciate the value of action in maintaining interest in a magazine story from month to month, but I think there is something more valuable, the worth of which is often neglected. That thing is characterization. What the hero does we may forget. What he *is* stays with us—much longer than a month. Boys, I am sure, would follow *Robinson Crusoe* in serial form principally because of the fascinating character of the hero; but a great deal that helps to give us the rounded character of the man is mere flesh, and editors would strip it off in serializing the story.

"These words of mine are hardly a full defense of the view I hold that a good novel is by its very nature serial. There are complexities of magazine publishing that raise

questions—more questions than can be answered in so limited a space as this."

Now, what does the magazine editor have to say about all this? He is the man who receives thousands of letters yearly from boys and girls all over the world; and from these letters he learns what young people want. He tempers these requests and suggestions with his maturer views of life—never losing the juvenile's angle of it—and demands of his serial writers stories which keep pace with life today. Here is Clayton Holt Ernst's comment on serials. Mr. Ernst, editor-in-chief of *The Open Road for Boys* magazine—one of the three great juvenile monthlies—a writer himself of a number of boys' books and serials, says:

"Of necessity the junior novel and the serial are two different forms of fiction. The book may be read casually, laid down, and picked up at the reader's convenience. Not so is it with the serial. Here is a story with a week or a month intervening between parts. Each serial installment must have its characters so built by the author that they will stand out sharply and intensified. The reader's impression must be so strong that he cannot forget during the lapse of time. The installment climax must be vivid enough to hold over.

"The book reader has the entire story in his hand. He may, if he wishes, know its consummation instantly by ruffling through the pages. While he demands a rising interest in the narrative, he does not find himself left palpitating at the end of a chapter without the possibility immediately of knowing the answer to it all. It takes clever writing to build serial installments so that the reader retains a conscious desire to know what happens until the

next issue of the magazine arrives. It is true, of course, that all serials are not packed with action, but there must be a feeling of definite progress in order to keep the installment-to-installment interest. *The Open Road* serials are generally action stories since our readers demand them."

The critic who examines both the magazine serial and the published book is in an excellent position to comment upon two fiction forms. Dr. John Clair Minot, literary editor of the *Boston Herald*, one time an editor of the late *Youth's Companion*, himself an author of boys' and girls' stories, makes the following statement:

"The serial written with magazine publication in mind is constructed with a climax to each installment and a regularly rising action which reaches its most important peak at the conclusion of the tale. It takes editorial treatment to rebuild the continuity—if the serial is brought out as a book—so that the installment breaks do not show with disturbing and awkward results. A number of such books come to my desk and I can detect them almost immediately. There is as much good writing to be found in serials as in junior novels, but each form should be kept in its own field."

And now, a concluding word of warning: *be careful of taboos*. Parents, teachers, librarians, all ask that juvenile fiction avoid the following subjects—sex, late adolescent social problems, alcohol, insanity, drugs, disease, blood-and-thunder when gory details and brutality are at all in focus, mawkishness, physical disability (paralysis, bodily deformity, etc.), profanity, vulgarity, and unnecessarily full of ungrammatical dialogue. Length also may militate against the story. Serials are seldom shorter than 20,000

words (except in magazines for the very young) or longer than 60,000 words.

One more warning. The fact that you may once have been a boy or girl yourself does not predicate your ability to write fiction for juveniles. Keep away from the problem unless you know youth as a youth. The juvenile reader detects the difference instantly. You must neither "write down" nor "write up" to him.

UNIT FOUR

CREATING OTHER FICTION FORMS

I. THE SHORT SHORT STORY

IF MEMORY serves me correctly, it was Cotton Mather, that celebrated (and verbose) writer of New England colonial times, who placed above his study door the admonition, excellent for authors in every generation—"Be brief!" Mather's advice, applied to modern fiction, finds its most successful and provocative example in the short short story. This very brief yarn represents the satisfactory answer to what appears to be the literary test given to fiction by the average American: "Can I read it while running for a street car?" Furthermore, the short short story has achieved sufficient recognition in the realm of letters to bring forth the pronouncement by a distinguished (American) critic that it is "America's only real and original contribution to literary form." It would seem, therefore, that the "vest-pocket" tale has become a force with which we must reckon, and an examination of it may reveal certain instructive features.

I propose to investigate the short short story from the standpoint of its mechanics, so that a group of fundamental principles may be set up to guide writers who wish to essay this type of narrative. The investigation will be pursued by comparing and contrasting the machinery of the short short narrative with that of its sister form, the conventional short story. The rules which will develop from this analysis are, of course, to be considered flexible enough to allow for individual differences in theme, plot, and the writer's personality or style. Note carefully the following ten points:

1. *Structure.* Physically, the short short story is composed (as is the short story) of an introduction, body, and conclusion. The specific differences between the forms of the lesser and greater tales occur in the length of these elements, in their composition, and in their treatment. For example, the introduction of the short short narrative should seldom run longer than a paragraph—two at most. A single sentence is frequently more satisfactory. The opening of the short story, on the other hand, may sometimes cover a number of pages. The body of the short short yarn should not include more than three or perhaps four swiftly moving incidents which are integral phases of the central purpose of the story. Conversely, the body of the longer yarn may comprise a large number of virtually independent scenes. The conclusion of the short short story is exceedingly brief, sharply focused, and should carry a "sting" in the end of it. It does not, in the manner of its full-length relative, have to catch up various scattered threads which represent minor problems of plot.

2. *Length.* The short short story may vary in length between 500 and 2,500 words. A workable size that finds the best markets is about 1,200 words. As against this brevity, the conventional short story may fix its extremes between 3,000 and 12,000 words, with a practical average of 5,000–6,000 for most publications.

3. *The Unities.* The short short yarn must never violate the Greek unities (one time, one place, one action). For instance, the best of these tales generally confine their time of action to a single hour or a day—seldom to as much as a week. The place should be limited to one clearly defined locale, which needs but a hasty pen picture. The action should concern one all-important problem with no

suggestion of bypaths into minor occurrences. As against these strict rules, the requirements of the full-length short story appear to be far more flexible: greater time and space are permitted for the unraveling of complexities.

4. *Emphasis.* The short short story stresses plot particularly. It is in far too great a hurry to have time for the concurrent development of the various phases of characterization, setting, atmosphere, and so on—that is left to the conventional short story.

5. *Description.* The short short narrative employs description sparingly. To avoid delaying the unfolding of the plot, the descriptive matter is cautiously interwoven through the action elements. In other words, since from start to finish the story is in a hurry, it must be photographed on the run. Its pictures must be *moving pictures.*

6. *Materials.* As against the substance of the short story the materials of the short short are definitely restricted. They must be simple, few, and dynamic. Compare O. Henry's *Gift of the Magi,* a typical "vest-pocket" story, with any full-length tale in one of the "slick" magazines on your newstand. Note how slim and uncomplicated O. Henry's story substance is in contrast. Observe, also, the significant difference in the number of characters, in the varying locales, in the time elements, and in the problems of background.

7. *The Angle of Narration.* Keeping strictly to a single point of view is even more important in the short short than in the ordinary short story. The picture may be revealed through the eyes of the omniscient author or through those of one of the characters. But the story angle which is employed at the start must be continued until the close. This rule is often violated by the ordinary

short story, and results in a curiously confused, out-of-focus affair. Maintain the narrative angle consistently.

8. *The Plot.* The short short like the ordinary short story has, as its backbone, the plot or basic problem. It must, in other words, be built around an objective, stated or implied. To be more specific, the principal character (or characters), early in the narrative, discovers himself involved in a situation which demands swift resolution. His struggle to solve the problem gives us the story interest. Let us analyze the plot from the standpoint of the well-known triangle—here, perhaps, specially interpreted. Angle A may represent the leading actor; angle C, the goal or solution of his problem; and angle B, the problem obstacle which keeps him from reaching his goal. It can be seen that angle C, so long as it is of intrinsic importance, is of less interest to the reader than angle B. Thus the strength of the story will depend upon the care with which angle B is constructed. Virtually every "popular" short short story is built upon this triangular basis, and it differs from its longer relative chiefly in its simplicity, its tempo, and its absence of numerous lesser obstacles. The "flashback" or device used to gather up hurriedly previous facts or incidents necessary for the reader's information at the start of the story should be brief and, if possible, incorporated, to avoid delay, in the forward-moving action.

Deserving of special attention is the matter of the conclusion. Its substance shows one of the greatest differences between the short short story and its longer sister. The brief yarn always concludes with a surprise, a sting, a turning of the tables. It is the O. Henry twist—plus. This trick ending gives a flavor and piquancy to the short

short story that cannot be achieved by the full-length yarn. And note this fact! In the construction of such a yarn the surprise ending is usually the *starting point* of the author's preparation. Once he has determined upon the turnabout and makes certain that it is legitimate (plausible) and, at the same time, completely unpredictable, he works back to his introduction.

What is a good example of a well-plotted short short tale that shows this surprise ending to best advantage? Let us examine one which appeared as a prize story* some time ago in one of the women's magazines. Between 1,500 and 2,000 words in length, the story was, briefly, as follows:

A clothing salesman who prided himself on his tact, his judgment of character, and his ability to please his customers by knowing and finding exactly what they wanted was one day confronted by two customers—a young man and his wife. They were, they said quietly, seeking a suit of clothes for a little boy. The salesman, as a test of his selling ability, set himself the task of being particularly pleasing to his clients, by finding for them just what he believed they wished. But as his enthusiasm rose, their diffidence seemed to increase. He showed them numerous suits with excellent selling arguments for each. He indicated the great durability of this cloth, the fast color of that, the tear-resisting qualities of another. Still they seemed not to warm to his eager suggestions. Presently, he brought out a suit and mentioned that as an added attraction, the firm was giving away a baseball and bat with the purchase. This announcement appeared to interest the buyers even less. Eventually, however, they

* "The Salesman," *Ladies Home Journal*, 1931.

fixed upon one of the suits, gave their name and address for the charge, and departed. The remainder of the day the salesman was depressed. He felt somehow that he had failed, yet he could figure out no one reason for it. That night at home he sat down to read the evening paper—still wondering why he had not "clicked" with his customers. Suddenly, he came upon a significant notice in the death columns. There was to be a funeral on the morrow for this young couple's little boy. Then he understood.

The above outline of the short short story is worth studying from the standpoint of its mechanics. The characters are but three in number; the situation, simple; the locale, principally laid in the department store; the time, a few hours; the action, achieved largely through dialogue; the surprise in the conclusion, a legitimate one accomplished without playing false with the reader. It has not enough of substance to form a basis for an ordinary short story; it is far too important for a sketch. The short short medium is the perfect vehicle for it.

9. *Material.* The short short story usually employs as its core idea what might at first appear to be an incident or scene taken from a full-length tale. This would be true were it not for the fact that few short story scenes could be made complete enough for this purpose. Thus it is that the briefer narrative represents the *essence*, not the bone or skeleton of the longer story. Practical core ideas, therefore, can be chosen from the ordinary sources of the short story, but they must not be too heavily built upon or over-elaborated. Probably the best sources of suggestive story ideas are the daily newspapers and such magazines

as *Time*, *News-Week*, *The Digest*, and curiously enough, the movie publications. Here is a sample taken at random from the files of these theme storehouses.

A tricky real estate dealer manages to sell an unsuspecting old couple a plot of land to which he has no legal claim. Shortly after the false papers are passed, the dealer hears of the discovery of oil on the property and hastens to buy the land at a considerably higher price. When these second papers are passed, the dealer finds that, by a technicality of law, his purchase has succeeded only in legalizing the old couple's title, and that he now is not only minus his land, but also has placed himself in the toils of the police.

Keep in mind that such an item forms only the springboard idea for a short short narrative. Mark Hellinger in his syndicated daily brief tales uses far more slender themes and with consistently interesting results.

10. *Markets.* The markets for the short short story are decidedly limited, but they are nearly always open to new material and pay very well indeed for quality production. Among the principal markets are *Collier's*, *Story*, *Cosmopolitan*, *American Mercury*, *Argosy*, *Black Mask*, *Country Gentleman*, *Esquire*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Liberty*, *Mademoiselle*, *McCall's*, *Menorah Journal*, *New Yorker*, *Photoplay*, *Pictorial Review*, *Western Story*, *Cavalcade*, *Coronet*, and *Bachelor.*

The short short story is probably one of the most difficult of the fiction forms to do well. It demands craftsmanship of a higher order, plus an inventiveness close to that of an O. Henry. Don't attempt it until you have mastered the technique of conventional short fiction.

II. THE NOVELETTE

THE average beginner, when he comes upon an idea which seems to possess narrative possibilities, nearly always writes it, or tries to write it, as a short story. The reasons for this are obvious: first, his reading experience makes him more familiar with the short story than with any other fiction form; second, inertia usually dictates brevity. Several interesting facts develop out of this apparently instinctive inclination of amateur authors and they explain much of the waste, discouragement, and failure that attend literary apprentices.

Here is what frequently happens.

A tyro author conceives, one day, what he believes to be a bit of potentially good narrative material. More or less arbitrarily, he fixes in his mind the length limit of the completed story at approximately 5,000 words. He figures out some major characters and a lead situation, and off he goes. Now at this point any one of a number of things may occur. For instance, the going may become hard and it is almost with a superhuman effort that he manages to hit the minimum word limit. Then as he reads over what he has done, he discovers that the yarn is thin and that he has padded it unconscionably. It has little real vitality and he has stimulated it by artificial situations. Its characters do not convince because he has forced them into uncharacteristic action. He sees suddenly at this moment that the fiction idea he put into the framework of a short story is *far too small.* For all his attempts to pump it up, to expand it, it still rattles about in its surrounding struc-

ture. His next step should be to learn whether his original fiction idea is, let us say, a short short story, or perhaps only a scene, or an incident. The procedure from such a point is discussed elsewhere in this book.

But suppose our author, having finished off the story as indicated earlier in the preceding paragraph, finds upon reading it over that it sounds more like the digest of a longer yarn. There are so many characters, for example, crowded into the narrative that not one of them has a chance at the plot action. There are so many scenes demanded that sharp condensation of each has been necessary. The whole thing seems stuffy, uncomfortable, awkward. What then? In such a difficulty our author generally makes a grievous mistake. He says to himself, "Ah, this is too long, too big for the short story compass. I have a *novel* on my hands." And he straightway sits down and tries to do a novel which virtually always fails.

Why should this be? Is it not possible that the author really did have novelistic material to deal with? The answer is that while he may have, it is rather unlikely. The reasons are many but a few of the principal ones are these: novel-writing demands auctorial maturity; this maturity is usually arrived at through apprenticeship in the shorter fiction forms. Beginning writers attempting the novel build it consciously or unconsciously not upon the novel scheme but upon the short-story pattern. But since I have just said that an apprenticeship in briefer fiction is a kind of requirement for successful novel-writing is there not a contradiction here? No, because of the existence of that transition form—the novelette.

Beyond the fact that the novelette *is* the transition unit between short and long fiction, no one seems to know

very much about it. This is strange since it dates back at least to the sixteenth century and is today more popular than it has ever been. True, literally hundreds of teachers and authors have tried to define the novelette and codify its rules—if any; but no practical working analysis of the story has yet been created.

I shall not, in this piece, pretend to have found the philosopher's stone: the novelette is still too much in flux to permit any such finalities. But I can outline a kind of "Guide to Essentials" which will be workable for the writer who wishes to undertake this fiction form as a sort of preparation for its more important kin, the novel. The following definition is merely something to start from; it does not encompass the novelette satisfactorily:

The novelette is that fiction form seldom shorter than 12,000 words, and never longer than 70,000 words which combines the basal structure of the short story with the tempo, characterization, and freedom of theme of the novel. Let us set up the "Minimum Essentials" of this medium length tale and note wherein it resembles its relatives, the short story and the novel, and how it achieves its own especial personality.

1. The length of the "average" novelette is around 30,000 words. I have put the word "average" in quotes because there is no such arbitrary figure agreed upon by anyone. In reaching it I have simply averaged the announced word requirements of the editors of the publications which buy novelettes. The Lincolnian rule that a man's legs should be "long enough to reach the ground" is the only important guide in this respect. Tell the story and forget the length. If it is good enough to publish, the editors will worry about the wordage—the author need not.

2. Since the novelette is, these days, being published as a complete unit, not in installments, there is no necessity for the "installment whip"—that rising note of hysteria concluding each section on terrific suspense as did the old-time serial. The story may be divided into chapters which may or may not end upon suspended action. Whether they do is dependent entirely on the plot demands of the story itself. Because the reader goes through the novelette at one sitting just as he reads a short story, artificial "come-on's" give little more than a feel of falseness and forced suspense to the narrative.

3. The novelette, like the short story, has as its starting point objective purpose. But while the short story is oftener concerned with the *development of an action*, the novelette emphasizes *character interpretation through action*. This means that the author must keep uppermost in his mind that the novelette's plot action is only justified when it makes characterization more significant. To do this well, i.e., to give purposeful personality to the plot is no simple matter. The writer must know his actors infinitely better, infinitely more sympathetically than he knows any character in the best short story he may ever write. One way of gaining this familiarity with the actors is to prepare separate biographies of each of the important characters in the cast. This is, of course, a definitely novelistic scheme, but since character treatment in the novelette is much the same as it is in the novel, all similar practices should be undertaken with it.

4. Just as more characters are permitted in the novelette with fuller development, so its scenes may be longer and more numerous. The length of scene is, naturally, geared to the plot demand to an extent, but much more time may

be allowed for the delineation of setting and for the establishing of atmosphere. Description denied the short story, longer, more casual flashbacks, more precise and detailed exposition—all of these elements find comfortable welcome in the novelette. This is not to be interpreted as an invitation to the author to embark upon a cruise of pictorial dullness or niminy-piminy character photography. But it can be understood as freeing the author from the need for the swift pen-slashes necessary to the fast nervous action of the short story.

5. The tempo of the novelette marks it apart at once from the short story. It cannot, by reason of its length alone, move with the same speed. Again, the detail of its characterization, its atmosphere, and its setting must reduce the pace measurably. But while the novelette may start a bit more slowly than the short story, it does pick up more haste as it moves along, and, unlike the novel, its conclusion is usually vigorous, swift, and unpredictable. Note that the final pages of the average novelette often resemble those of the short story in their tempo.

6. The short story is too brief to achieve any amount of rhythm. The short yarn runs so fast that it appears to pass through only one period. The novelette, on the contrary, has a chance to create a rhythm because it has a number of periods. A distinct pattern of repeated beats can be created through a set scheme of rising action in each scene. At the same time, the point which the action reaches in the preceding scheme should be slightly exceeded in the next, and the one which follows that should, in turn, rise beyond that, and so on. This, of course, is definitely linked with "pace" and, when the combination is properly made, it becomes tremendously effective for

certain types of the novelette—the adventure narrative especially. But these are flimsily mechanical devices. Nearly everyone can learn rhythm but no one can teach it. It comes through an increasing, musical awareness in the author's inner ear. It is one of the factors which aids the author in establishing his "writing personality." Tied inextricably into style, it becomes evident to the point of making all his work "characteristic." The beginner who is sensitive enough to the right pulsings of his story and can translate these into undertone- and overtone-regularity has built rhythm into his writing and will find the novelette (or the novel, for that matter) the best medium of expression for it.

7. Plot is, as has been said, of less moment in the novelette than is characterization. But to imply that plot is unimportant would be ridiculous. The novelette sometimes uses what can be called an "extended short story plot" for its framework. The extension is brought about simply by the increase in the number of scenes and the addition of actors to the cast. The novelette, by using what is sometimes called the "double plot," breaks with all the shorter fiction forms which, because of their brevity, have not room for the extra machinery. In the double plot of the novelette, the major plot acts as a kind of narrative base line which drives boldly toward its conclusion. The minor plot weaves back and forth through this base line, bringing subordinate characters and influences to contribute their bit and then disappear to reappear later. The amateur sometimes gets so interested in his minor plot that he temporarily obscures the action of the major. This brings about "loss of point" to the major plot and in vitiating it, destroys the purpose of the minor

plot and likewise of the whole novelette itself. The double plot is not required in the novelette but when it is used—and its only purpose is to add complexity to the involvement of the action—the matter of emphasis-placing should be perpetually watched.

8. Galsworthy says that the medium-length tale—the novelette—is the magic vehicle for atmospheric drama or for atmosphere alone. It is clear that the short story has little time for this and, on the other hand, that the novel can readily overdo it. In the section on the novel which follows this discussion of the novelette, you will find this matter of atmosphere and the way to create it taken up at some length. The beginner who is willing to study analytically Galsworthy's "The First and the Last" will see how these "rules" are brought into play to establish atmosphere which contributes both to characterization and plot with a result that is genuinely dramatic. The purely atmospheric novelette has a very limited commercial market, but the novelette of atmospheric drama is found increasingly in the big circulation magazines. Unless the amateur has an especial bent for atmospheric writing, he had better stick to novelettes of plot and characterization.

9. The new writer should, before attempting his first novelette, read those now appearing in the current publications. He would do well also—if he is serious about his task—to study those which have been put into permanent form separately or in anthologies. These will represent the historical record of the growth and change of novelette-writing and should prove of considerable significance because each is an example of what really amounts to a

well-defined design for construction. Specifically, I recommend the following novelettes:

Greene's *Pandosto*, Lyly's *Euphues*, Lodge's *Rosalind*, Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, Eliot's *Silas Marner* (who would ordinarily think of this as a novelette?), Harte's *M'liss* (see this in the movies, if you can, after reading the story), Stevenson's *The Suicide Club* (the movies botched this rather badly. See it for comparison with the yarn), Twain's *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg*, Barrie's *A Window in Thrums*, Galsworthy's *A Stoic*, Phillpott's *Evander*, Wister's *Mother*, Nason's *Three Lights from a Match* (all three tales), and—all arguments to the contrary—Hilton's *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*.

III. THE NOVEL

SCORES of books have been written about the novel as a fiction form, but because of the multiplicity of its types, constructions, and treatments, a really adequate and comprehensive study of it remains to be made. This essay must, because of its length and purpose, do little more than skeletalize certain broad features characteristic of an arbitrarily composite novel; yet such an outline should form a reasonably practical basis for working out the machinery and the approach to the conventional, craftsmanlike long-fiction piece. In presenting no one "type" of novel, it offers the synthesized essentials of all novels. It leaves the shaping into "kind" to the aim and capacity of the novelist.

The novel differs from every other fiction unit in length, subject, theme, breadth and variety of locale, sort and number of characters, complexity of plot, quality of atmosphere, pace, style, physical make-up, and general reader-appeal. Each of these points we shall now investigate to the end of creating a pattern of fundamentals which all novelists follow to a greater or lesser degree.

1. *Length.* The average novel, if there is such a thing, is approximately 100,000 words long. It may, at one extreme, run as low as 70,000 words and, at the other, as high as 600,000 words. While both extremities are rare, the author should always bear in mind that his purpose is to tell the story and let the word-count fall where it may.

2. *Subject.* The novel faces none of the subject taboos of the other fiction forms. An examination of the subjects

of the yearly grist of novels reveals really no limit to the kind and variety of pegs on which it is possible to hang a novel. Silver-mining to sex, aviation to agronomy—novels, hundreds of them, have been written about all of these subjects. And no squeamish magazine editors are lurking in the book publishers' offices to raise an admonitory finger and say, "But the *Hokum Magazine's* public won't stand for that," or "If we print that, certain of our old-maidish advertisers will cut down or cancel their space. Such a subject cannot be discussed in our medium." Publishers of books are a hardy, pioneering lot, and they are always taking the long chance that the public has either grown up or has become intellectually honest. Most of them lose most of the time, it is true, but they are the perennial adventurers of the literary world and if they fail to make much money at their trade, they still have a pretty good time and compromise very little.

3. *Theme.* Linked closely to subject is the problem of theme. What has been said in the preceding paragraph about taboos and publishers' attitudes holds here in precisely the same way. Theme is the statement of the general purpose of the story. If, for instance, Love is the subject, the theme may be to interpret the sacrifices a maid may make for a man although her case is hopeless and he is unworthy. The outstanding difference between the novel and its other fiction relatives is that the novel is not concerned with *what* happens but with *how* it happens, *to whom*, and *why*. It is involved with the growth, development, and change of one or more of the principal characters in the narrative. The plot that may wander along through the expansion of the theme is of interest only because of its assistance in explaining the actors. It is

at best a means, not an end. Thus the theme of the novel is of paramount importance. It demands one, two, or perhaps a half a dozen individuals in its personnel whose characters can be revealed in a slow process of aggrandizement or deterioration. But of this more will be discussed under Point 5.

4. *Breadth and Variety of Locale.* The novel is the only fiction form not bound in one way or another to the dicta of the Greek "unities" (one time, one place, one action). The novel may, as in the case of the "picaresque" or wandering tale, use half the earth as its locale. The picture it presents may include in its focus huge areas of land or sea. It may blithely change its scene from England to Australia, from Sweden to the Argentine and never lose track of its narrative purpose, of its theme. The novel is long enough to provide sufficient preparation and continuity to span the distances between these geographic points; hence limitless possibilities in the way of changing backgrounds, color and atmosphere, become available.

5. *Sort and Number of Characters.* The short story writer usually starts with a plot into which a few characters are thrown and at the conclusion of the yarn the plot rounds itself off neatly and disposes of the characters. Few novelists who begin with plot as a basis ever do a very worth while book. Since character change is the core of the novel the author's first job is to discover an actor who will have within him not unusual qualities but recognizably human ones. Thereafter it will not be what the actor *does* but what he *is* and *becomes* that will furnish the interest and strength of the narrative. To reveal a character and to show his advance or degeneration, the author sets up opposing and coöperating forces. These may work indi-

vidually or collectively upon the central character and usually are composed of the following: setting and atmosphere as an influence; other characters; natural cataclysms; social and economic activations on a broad scale; and, working certain of these elements into an integrated mechanical purpose, plot.

The most interesting novels to write and read are, of course, those which are concerned with human relations—the influence of one character upon another. Here setting, atmosphere, and all the other items merely aid in localizing and identifying the actors. Such a novel is Hugh Walpole's *The Old Ladies*. An excellent example of the character caught in the toils of social and economic conflict may be seen in *Tobacco Road* or Farrell's *Studs Lonigan* trilogy. One thing is clear, however, and that is that for the beginning novelist a single one of these possible character-developing forces—not a combination of them—should be employed. The novelist who attempts to create for his first book a character entangled with other characters, with influential setting and atmosphere, with natural cataclysms, social and economic problems, and the machinations of Fate, will simply be bogged down by the burden of all these weighty things and fail to do more than a muddy, unintelligible job of it.

The first task, then, is to find a character of sufficient quality. The next is to discover worthy protagonists and antagonists. Unlike the short story and its near relatives, the novel does not insist upon contrasting characters. This means that the actors in the novel need not be hauled about and photographed for their differences. They may often be aligned for their similarities. To keep the characters separate, to give them, in other words,

their own real personalities, yet not make them mechanically contrasting types is one of the novelist's special problems. He achieves success in this only when he knows his principal characters so thoroughly that they become distinct human beings. Once this is done the novel will begin to write itself to some extent. The forces have been set up because, to use Richard Aldington's title for one of his novels, "All Men Are Enemies," and conflict is the soul of every narrative.

The novel, therefore, must be built with one actor as the center and with other actors and other forces as the character-changing influences, the activating and motivating agents. Lights and shadows, motions and thoughts, interests and urges will slowly direct, for good or bad, the character-growth of the principal in the piece.

6. *Complexity of Plot.* It has been stated before that plot in the novel is unimportant. It is clear that the more plot obtrudes itself upon this type of fiction, the more characterization must suffer. If this be true, then the average detective or mystery yarn is no novel at all but a very long short story. Yet plot can be used judiciously to aid character development. Plot is, after all, only the mechanized pattern of action and in the novel it may be considered largely as a road which the character may take if he chooses. Whether he takes the road at all, or whether he starts along it but stops midway is not of moment in the novel. If, however, there are to be many actors in the cast of the novel, it is well to fix upon some sort of plot plan, some kind of fairly well-defined groove, to keep action threads from accidental tangling. The "confusion" so often remarked in a beginner's novel comes from his being unable to direct the numerous characters so that they will contribute to the "starring"

actor. Nothing should minimize the impact of the central character's life story.

The machinery of plot has been previously discussed. It is my belief that plot is a fixed mechanical pattern which permits of innumerable variations within its general scheme but remains fundamentally the same whether it is applied to the short story or any other fiction form. The plot of the novelette, for instance, may be single or double, but whether single or double, larger or smaller, simpler or more complex, it still remains the short-story plot. The same is true of the novel which virtually always uses the major and minor plot plan. The point to note here is the angle of narration. The novel gives time and space enough to permit a single story to be told in many different ways and in this it breaks with the shorter fiction forms (except for the novelette). The tale may be told objectively by the author. It may, at the same time—as it usually is—be examined through the eyes of the leading character. And it may also be seen through the minds of any or all of the other principal actors. But where the sub-plot is concerned, straight author-objective angle narration should be used. The minor characters should not be investigated through their minds. What they *think* does not count and what they *do* is only of importance when it has bearing upon the actions and reactions of the principal characters.

When the objective-subjective major plot is well in hand and the author has determined the various narrative angles (or story-telling points of view) of his main actors, he can then entangle his sub-plot with its straightforward objectivity in the major plot and not worry about maintaining dramatic proportion.

Let us take a case in point. Here is a story* which has

* Freely adapted from Sidney Kingsley's play, *Dead End.*

for its theme the presentation, without comment, of a young man born in the slums who hopes not only to make something of himself but to change the conditions of the crime-infested neighborhood around him and so destroy the atmosphere which tends to create gangsters out of the children of the tenements. I have said "without comment" in the previous sentence. By that I mean without the author's editorializing on the situation. To say it another way, he simply shows the picture as it is. If the young man succeeds—and the chances are against him—very well; there will be no sermonizing about it by the author. If he fails, this he will do also without any wailings or pointings-with-alarm by the writer. We shall spend our time, at first, mainly in this character's mind.

We discover, at the start of the yarn, that the young man is just about getting by, financially. His immediate problem is to live. His goal must be temporarily subordinated to the task at hand. During this, however, he is no less impressed by all the circumstances which brought about his original decision and he tries to figure out both today and tomorrow while his selfish and his unselfish purposes fight against each other. Suppose he falls in love with a social worker, a wealthy young woman who is, at the time she meets our hero, the fiancée—by a necessary family business arrangement—of a pleasant but unimportant man of her own set.

Two entanglements are immediately indicated beyond the special problems which the young man has to cope with at the outset. Love, he knows, should, for economic reasons, be denied; love for a wealthy young woman violates the instincts which tell him that he must win his way by his own strength, that he must achieve his ends

some other way than by marriage—even if marriage were possible. And it does not seem possible for—the next stumbling block—she is presented as already engaged and shortly to marry the other man.

All this composes the main plot so far. Not even a hint of sub-plot has appeared. But now suppose the thoroughly respectable young sister of a gangster who lives in the neighborhood has ever since school days been secretly in love with our hero. This we may or may not see through her mind. For the moment it is better perhaps that we do not but find out these facts objectively. She wants her gangster brother to break off with a gun moll whose expensive tastes are leading him deeper and deeper into crime. Then one day there is a fight in the neighborhood between the gangster and a policeman; the latter is killed. The gangster appeals to his sister to hide him or help him during the investigation. So far this part of the story is nothing but sub-plot. But now the major and minor plots suddenly interweave. There was a witness to the shooting affray and our hero was that witness. At that particular moment he had been strolling through the alley trying to decide upon a course of action regarding his love for the society girl. The time has grown short because the marriage has been set earlier than the original date and he must make his appeal today before it is too late. Then when time counts most, the killing occurs before his eyes and the gangster's sister asks him to protect her brother. . . .

Thus the main and subordinate plots coil about each other, each throwing a character-challenge to our hero, each important enough in itself to carry the narrative without the other; yet the two combine here into the

major plot to reveal the development of not one but several characters. The hero's character will be kept always in sharp focus. Until the major plot separates again, the story can be told through the minds of any of the now principal actors. Plot is a strong element in this particular story and, if many further complications are added, it may supersede in interest the growth of character and so damage to a degree the basic intention of the novelist. To prevent further inroads by plot upon characterization, the novelist should begin to simplify or at least hold static any emerging sub-plot hereafter. The main plot will then not increase its emphasis and characterization will have a chance to show through with greater significance.

Another way of preventing over-emphasis upon plot is to keep down the number of principal characters. Remember, as characters are added, the plot becomes distended; with more plot there can be less individual characterization; and as individual characterization diminishes, the value of the novel decreases. Nearly anyone can assemble a machine—plot is easy. But it takes a creator to build a human being; and the reading world is still more interested in human beings than in the mechanical contraptions they have put together for a moment's pleasure or convenience.

7. *Quality of Atmosphere.* Short fiction, I have said, seldom has time to do much with atmosphere. In the brief narrative it is established by a few swift strokes of the brush and is built up whenever the author has a chance. The novel can make atmosphere one of its character-determining forces and the novelist who is a master of description can build an atmosphere which becomes as definite and realizable as physical details of setting.

Properly done it can achieve the strength almost of another character in the cast. It can certainly become an importance force. The writer builds atmosphere out of setting by selecting certain features of background and emphasizing them by repetition. If, for instance, a dark, threatening mountain appears as a backdrop for some of the scenes, by dwelling upon the gloomy, foreboding characteristics of the beetling crags, the sinister, hunched shoulders of the rocks as they thrust themselves against the sun and cast long shadows over the houses below, the author can create a practical force to use for and against the actors. The repetition of the creak of that selfsame floorboard; the reiterated cry of the loon on the lonely lake; the measured tick of the clock as it breaks the silence; the perpetual howl of the wind through the broken pane of glass in the empty attic window—repeating any or a number of these or similar items, sometimes in the same—sometimes in different terms, is one of the author's chief devices for creating atmosphere. And only the novel has sufficient time and space for this studied work. The quality of atmosphere, once it is established, can be maintained or improved only by some sort of author's sixth sense which comes from experience. It can easily be overdone—and usually is by the amateur—and when this happens its first effect is to clog the plot; its next to distort the characterization. With a good set of characters and a sound plot, the beginner would do well to let atmosphere take care of itself. Expertness in atmosphere will come only after skill in the first two problems has been reached.

8. *Pace.* There is very little, except of a most general nature, to say about pace in the novel since it is geared almost entirely to the individual purpose and circum-

stances of the story. But this is always true: the pace of the novel can never equal that of the shorter fiction forms because it cannot possibly hold its speed over all the pages and incidents it has to cover. But the novel can vary its pace at will whereas the short story should constantly gather momentum to break the tape with bullet-like force. The novel is, after all, the story of a life, or a portion of a life and, like the business of living, it must fit its tempo to the varying conditions, moods, and matters along the way. Contrast and similarity in pace, scene by scene, can make the novel very human, very realistic. Any mechanical attempt to fix pace in this fiction form will make it a wooden, artificial creature with robot action which has no place in the novelistic scheme of writing.

9. *Style.* There are many volumes on style, a study of which will usually lead the beginner into trouble by making him conscious of superficial rhetorical devices. The less the amateur author knows about style, the fresher his writing will be. After he has written long enough and conscientiously enough, he will arrive at a style which will be, whether good or bad, very characteristically his own, and which will serve as a kind of trade-mark for him. If then he wishes to check certain known stylistic difficulties he has, that is time enough to consult the academic priests. Nearly every first novel is commented upon by critics as being uneven in style. This is usually the result of poor story preparation, not a lack of information about style. The author who knows where he is going and how, generally starts off and gets to his destination with a minimum of haltings, fumblings, and indecisions. Style will at least be consistent when the author is well-fortified with the assurance that this full preparation gives.

10. *Physical Make-up.* Novels, depending upon their

length and time-phases, are divided into "books," chapters, and sections. The use of the term "book" is primarily intended to indicate a time-phase. It enables the author to span long periods without apology or explanation. It tells the reader that what happened fell automatically into these units and any occurrences between the units are to be considered as without significance. The chapter division is used to a lesser degree for this same purpose, but it may also serve another end and that is, where the story demands it, either to shift the scene quite sharply and/or to create suspense. This latter purpose is a rather cheap device and, save for detective and mystery novels, is falling out of practice. The matter of titling chapters is also temporarily out of favor. As to the length of the chapters of a novel, no one can say. It is dictated entirely by the feeling of the author and the dramatic values of the scenes as they combine into larger units. The section is used for minor scene-shifting and to break up an overlong chapter which might otherwise lose its impact without some sort of pause. If chapters are used and numbered, sections should not be numbered and never should they be titled or lettered. Prologues and epilogues are sometimes built into novels but they are best left to skilled novelists to toy with. Amateurs too often conceive of these elements as beginning and concluding opportunities for apologia and so frequently ruin what might have been a fair piece of work. One final suggestion: make your first chapter brief, and your last chapter briefer still. Don't try to tell the whole story in your first chapter; don't try to summarize it completely in your last. You have a hundred thousand words between these extremities in which to carry out your aims. Don't worry at either end.

11. *General Reader Appeal.* The novelist should always

remember that his reader is a much more thoughtful, patient, and intelligent person than is the average magazine or newspaper reader. He is not in a hurry (this novel reader) to rush through the book. He will probably read the volume piecemeal and will remember each time he returns to the story (usually he finishes the current chapter before his interruption) where he left off, and thus does not need a summary in the next chapter as does the serial reader. This novel reader will face the facts of existence much more realistically than will his other reading brothers. He wants something of substance to set his teeth in and the only thing he revolts at is journalistic trickery, implausibility, and cheap devices scaled to the moron mind. He asks that he be allowed to examine your appraisal of life and the men who live it, and he asks you for sincerity and honesty and truth. He will read your novel because he hopes that it will do to him what certain fine novels have done to him before—leave him a somehow different person from the one he was at the start; leave him exalted or exulting; amused or sympathetic; appreciative or stimulated. That is the job that the novelist faces. It is no minor responsibility; it is no easy task. Unless you are willing to give up months instead of hours to your writing; unless you are willing to accept inner satisfactions rather than large financial returns; unless you are prepared to yield something that is very much a part of you to a public which may ask for more until you are empty—keep away from novel-writing.

UNIT FIVE

CONSIDERING ASSOCIATED FICTION FORMS

I. THE RADIO SCRIPT

Radio Drama Contrasted with Stage Drama

SINCE radio is a rather recent form of dramatic art, comparisons must frequently be made with drama written for stage production. And the person who wishes to write fiction for radio must be equipped with a good working knowledge of the elements which combine to produce drama. The essential points of difference between radio drama and drama written for stage production are:

1. *Radio drama is aural—not visual.*

Radio drama demands imagination on the part of the listener. Radio listeners can only hear; they cannot see. Hence radio drama must create a picture in the minds of these listeners. The methods of creating this mental picture, and of stimulating the imaginative faculties of the listener will be discussed in detail below. They are:

a. Characteristic voices
b. Change in tempo of voices; i.e., one fast, clipped—one drawling, languid
c. Lines which point character and which describe action
d. Sound effects
e. Atmospheric music

A combination of the foregoing five factors will establish in the minds of listeners, the stage setting, costume, features, and gestures of actors. With successful radio drama these factors are effective substitutes for backdrop, stage setting, color and style of costumes, and appearance of actors. Perhaps the general outlines, the setting, the

colors will be different in the mind of every individual listener; nevertheless, a complete mental picture will be created.

The following specific example illustrates the basic difference in treatment of stage plays and radio plays—the manner in which the writer's approach to his plot must differ in the two separate media.

Let us assume that we are opening a mystery play. On the stage if tenseness and an atmosphere of mystery are to be registered at the outset, the fewer the spoken lines and the greater the use of startling lighting and general visual effects the better. Omitting, for the sake of brevity, the detailed description of stage setting and of separate pieces of furniture and their placement, the opening of the stage play might read as follows. Stage directions are enclosed in brackets.

[Curtain rises on stage almost totally dark. Wind howls outside the room, which is faintly seen to be a library. Door left rear opens slowly, admitting beam of rather dim light. The figures of a man and of a young woman slip quietly into the room. Man closes door softly, as woman moves to center rear. Man switches on flashlight, illuminating door of wall safe. He hands flashlight to woman, who holds it focused on dial of safe. She takes small piece of paper from her dress, holds it where he can see it. Consulting this, he turns knob of safe right four times, stopping at a number. Consults paper, turns knob left three times, stopping at a number. Consults paper, turns knob right to a number. He tries safe door, slowly and quietly opens it. In light of flashlight, still held by the woman, he gropes inside the safe, and finally

selects an envelope from the main compartment of the safe. Puts envelope into inside pocket of his coat. Slight sound of window, right rear, being raised. Both figures at the safe stiffen and remain motionless. Man seizes flashlight from woman, flashes off the light. Tense silence for a moment. Another slight sound from the window. Wind and rain are slightly louder.]

Doris

Stage whisper The window!

Tom

Quickly Ssh!

He flashes light on window, revealing a weird, ghastly face. Doris screams. Face disappears from the window. Flashlight is snapped off by the man.

Doris

Sobbing Tom—where are you going? Oh—don't leave me!

Tom

Just a second, Doris.

He is faintly seen crossing back to door, left rear. He snaps on flashlight, revealing light-switch in the wall. He touches switch, flooding library with light. Figure of elderly man is disclosed, right, front, sprawled on floor in distorted position.

Doris

Screams Oh, Tom! It's—it's Father!

Tom

Stay here, Doris!

He crosses to figure on floor, unbuttons coat and vest, feels for the heart.

Doris

Tom—is he—is he—dead?

Tom

Looking back towards Doris I'm not sure. Call a doctor, Doris—quickly!

* * *

Here, the action is almost entirely stage directions. Actual movement of the actors, facial expressions and light effects carry on the plot development. Lines are used only when absolutely necessary to reveal the identity of characters and the actions of their minds, which cannot be carried to the audience by physical movement or by facial expression, and to make sure that such reactions are carried to the audience in spite of a darkened stage. In other words, the audience of a stage play thinks both visually and aurally: the drama registers upon auditors' minds through two senses—those of sight and hearing. And, naturally, dramatists writing for the stage strive to take as complete advantage as possible of this double appeal to the senses.

The opening scene of a radio play which registers exactly the same action requires the use of whispered dialogue, together with certain sound effects. Basically, the dialogue will carry on the action, while the sound effects will work on listeners' imaginations to convey much of the same reactions in their minds as the stage furnishings and lighting effects produce in their minds through the eye.

However, in some cases, the two can overlap—that is, lines may help set the invisible stage and provide atmosphere, and sound effects can help carry on the action. In the best examples of dramatic radio writing this overlapping is usually employed, since by this means any possible monotony is avoided. The following opening for

a radio script registers exactly the same action as the stage opening just outlined.

The broadcast opens without using a description by the announcer to set the stage—in other words, only actual dialogue and the use of sound effects are utilized.

Sound of high wind registers for a moment, with beating of rain against windows. Sound of door opening slowly.

Tom

Whisper, coming in Is this the library, Doris?

Doris

Whisper, coming in Yes. Ssh, Tom—no noise! Shut the door quietly!

Sound of door closing slowly

Tom

Whisper Where's the safe?

Doris

Whisper In this wall!

Tom

Whisper Wait a second. Here's the flashlight. *Snap of flashlight switch* Ah—here we are!

Doris

Whisper Let me hold the light.

Tom

Whisper Careful, Doris! Keep the light as low as you can!

Doris

Whisper How's that?

Tom

Whisper Better! Now—what's the combination?

Doris

Whisper Right four times to sixty-two! *Clicking of combination wheel of safe. Wind howls, rain beats against windows.*

Tom

Whisper Sixty-two—right! Now what?

Doris

Whisper Left—three times—to forty-eight!

Clicking of combination wheel of safe. Wind howls.

Tom

Whisper What's next?

Doris

Whisper Right—just once—to sixteen!

Clicking of combination wheel of safe. Wind again, rain against windows.

Tom

Whisper Sixteen! There we are—and, Doris—it's open! Come closer with the light!

Doris

Whisper In that main compartment, Tom—near the back! Have you got the right envelope?

Tom

Whisper Yes—here it is!

Doris

Whisper Put it in your pocket—quickly! I thought I heard something!

Tom

Whisper So did I! Put out the light! *Click of flashlight switch.* Now—quiet a minute!

Wind and beating of rain register. Then a faint sound of window being raised. Wind and rain louder.

Doris

Excited whisper Tom—someone's raising the window!

Tom

Whisper Let me have the flashlight!

Doris

Whisper Oh, Tom—I'd rather not see!

Tom

Whisper Wait a minute! I'll flash the light on the window—for an instant! Watch it, now!

Click of flashlight switch

Doris

Screams Oh, Tom—that face in the window! That awful, fiendish face!

Tom

Quiet, Doris! It's gone from the window, whatever it was!

Doris

Sobbing Oh, Tom—Tom!

[*Wind and rain louder for a moment*]

Tom

Whisper Doris—are you all right?

Doris

Whisper Yes—but [*she sobs*] I'm awfully frightened!

Tom

Whisper I'm going to take a chance and switch on the lights, Doris! I'm positive there's *something* in this room!

Doris

Whisper Something, Tom? Oh—what do you mean?

Tom

Whisper Just a second. Here's the light switch. Now pull yourself together. Here goes the light!

Click of light switch

Doris

A loud scream Oh, Tom—look! There on the floor! It's—it's Father!

Tom

Slight distance Doris—don't come over here! Go call a doctor—quickly!

Doris

Tom—is he—is he dead?

Tom

I'm not sure, Doris. But go—go quickly! We must have a doctor!

This radio scene, which consumes considerably more space in type than the corresponding stage scene, actually plays in much less time. In radio drama there is rarely any suspension of lines for the registering of action—and when the convention is used, the action will be registered entirely by sound effects which require much less time than actual action of characters on a visible stage.

By careful comparison between the stage version and the radio version, it will be discovered that every slightest action, which is registered on the stage by movement, facial expression or lines must be registered in radio drama entirely by lines and sound effects—and when any slight-

est action is lost, because of lack of detail in lines and in the handling of sound effects, the whole impression on listeners' minds is consequently weakened, and the complete thread of the plot is likely to be lost.

Lines for radio drama, as the illustration of a portion of a typical script indicates, must be "over-written"; that is, characters must include in their speeches items such as actual location of objects and of other characters; they must describe colors and odors, and also actions which have taken place or are about to take place Also, sound effects which would not be normally audible must help carry on the action—for instance, the clicking of a safe combination wheel and of a flashlight switch. In every detail radio drama must be so written as to enable an audience of blind people to visualize all phases of the play by means of their ears alone.

Consequently, since his listeners can think only aurally and receive impressions through their ears alone, the successful radio dramatist must learn to think in terms of aural impressions. He must write lines which will register every detail of complicated action; he must intersperse proper routines of sound effects exactly where they will help to carry on the action of the plot and to heighten the atmosphere of his drama.

2. *Radio drama differs from drama written for stage production in that most radio dramas are constructed as episodes in continuing series.*

Every stage production is a unit. Once produced, a successful stage presentation achieves hundreds of performances, and the only changes made are in the polishing of lines, in the "pointing" of situations which have failed to draw sufficient interest during early performances, and in the perfecting of other minor details.

A radio dramatic show in structure is comparable neither with the one-act play, nor with the three-act drama. The distinctive feature of successful radio drama is that it is generally a series of episodes, with each fifteen-minute or half-hour unit *complete in itself*. Nor is a radio series analogous to the magazine serial story. Rather, a series of dramatic sketches for radio might be defined as a basic framework into which a new picture is set every week.

With the magazine serial, readers may always obtain back copies if they have missed an installment; moreover, usually a detailed summary is printed preceding every installment of the serial. With radio, on the other hand, an episode is presented once and then is gone forever. And time is at a premium on the air; the first two minutes of a fifteen-minute dramatic sketch cannot be devoted to a long summary of preceding episodes read by the announcer; every listener would have tuned-out long before the sketch itself opened. The first rule of a successful radio presentation, whether it be dramatic or musical, is that it must attract attention at the outset.

The audience which attends a stage production varies every day and with every performance, and the play runs only until everyone in the immediate vicinity has seen it. But a radio series grows in popularity as time goes on; the audience for any particular series of dramatic sketches tunes in regularly, and new listeners are added constantly. Hence a series of radio dramas has an audience which increases steadily, and its run may be indefinite.

3. *Radio drama differs from drama written for the stage in that radio drama is essentially tabloid.*

Action or character development can and does take

three times as long on the stage as it can over the air. The reasons are obvious. A stage production is planned to afford a full evening's entertainment—from two to three hours. It is planned, likewise, with an eye to pictorial effect; beautiful actresses are costumed in extravagant creations; "blank" minutes may elapse on the stage, minutes during which the audience is content to admire actress, actor, and scenic effects.

Moreover, the attention of the theatre-goer is frequently aided by the fact that he has had a pleasant dinner, and has set out in dress clothes with a congenial companion for an evening's diversion. He is in holiday spirit. His attention is aided also by the fact that he is one of a large group gathered in one theatre to witness one particular play, and this mass reaction—the fact that each theatre-goer is one of hundreds who have reached this particular house, at this particular time, to see this particular play—increases his attention. Also the fact that he has paid the price of admission inspires in the theatre-goer respect for the play he is about to witness. Unless the play is utterly boring, his attention does not wander; there is little chance of his growing weary, because the majority of dramatic stage productions are built in three parts, with two intermissions during which the theatre-goer may wander into the lobby and chat with his friends or otherwise divert his thoughts from the play. All these factors, then, influence the theatre-goer in favor of the play.

With the radio, however, the psychology of the listening audience is totally different. During the radio performance, the listener is not part of a mass seated in a theatre eager to be entertained; neither is he dressed in party

clothes. Instead, he is lounging in his own living room, frequently alone, perhaps reading an interesting book. Often he is chatting on household matters with members of his family. The radio listener is thus held and entertained by a new dramatic sketch almost against his will, for if the sketch drags or displeases him, he has many alternatives. He can turn his dial to another station; he can shut off the radio and read, or listen to his young daughter play the piano, or—he can fall asleep!

There are definite reasons then for the comparative times allotted to the stage production and to the radio sketch. The unit of time preferred for a radio play is fifteen minutes or a half-hour, for it has been proved that the listener's attention, unaided as it is by visual effects, cannot be held by radio drama much longer than thirty minutes.

Like the three-act stage play, radio sketches are generally built with one or more changes of scene; but with radio the interlude to denote change of scene or lapse of time is rarely longer than thirty seconds or a minute. Lines, action, and time are compressed in radio drama; hence radio drama is essentially tabloid.

In summary, because the psychology of the radio audience is so different from that of the theatre audience—because the radio listener is in his own home, exposed to dozens of distractions—the odds are against the success of the radio dramatic sketch. Therefore, the radio writer must recognize first of all this significant difference in receptive attitude between an audience seated in a theatre and an audience of listeners seated in individual homes throughout the country. This is the primary obstacle which radio writers must surmount in the creation of successful dramatic productions for the air.

Methods of Constructing Radio Dramatic Series

There are two general methods of constructing a radio dramatic series:

1. The first is a series of episodes with the same group of principal characters featured in every broadcast. Then each episode will carry forward the activities, will advance the lives of members of this group; but unlike the novel which is presented in serial form, every episode in the radio series must be built to rise to a satisfactory climax at the end—must be a complete story in itself.

Suppose, for example, we are planning a radio series based on incidents in the lives of a typical American family, the Browns. Our first consideration is the number and type of characters—characters whose voices and personalities may be readily differentiated on the air, characters fundamental enough to develop and to grow in popularity from week to week. Let us assume our characters will be Mr. and Mrs. Brown; Mr. Brown's maiden sister, Hattie; a son of college age; and a ubiquitous and obnoxious youthful daughter.

Our second consideration is locale. Do we wish to dramatize the doings of this typical family in its own community, or do we wish to take the Browns on vacation? Let us suppose we decide to follow them on their first trip to Europe. We decide to open the series with the Brown family aboard the first European liner they have ever seen. Obviously, many humorous incidents develop; one member of the family, preferably Mrs. Brown, will be worried about seasickness; the son, Henry, will promptly indulge in a shipboard flirtation which will furnish love-interest for several episodes; the old-maid aunt will likewise grow flirtatious—will conceivably shock the family by falling madly in love with a bogus count or

prince; and, of course, Mr. Brown will spend far too much time in the smoking-room to please his wife.

All the characters will be thoroughly established in the opening episode, but, in addition, this first sketch—and each succeeding sketch in the series—will be a complete story rising to a climax, while at the same time sufficient hints of subsequent doings will be thrown out to interest listeners in future episodes.

2. The second method of building a radio dramatic series is to establish a general theme as a framework, and then to present a different story in each broadcast—a story which revolves about the basic theme of the series. For instance, the general theme of a series of programs might be exploration, and in each broadcast in the series a prominent explorer might tell of his experiences, or a single experience of an explorer might be dramatized.

A radio series, whether it is a series of episodes featuring the same principal characters each week, or whether it presents a different story each week, must have a general program title—a title indicative either of the theme of all the stories in the series, or of the locale of all the stories, or of the principal characters. A series of rural sketches, let us say, might have a title as all-inclusive as, "Clearville Center." A series of unconnected love stories might have as title, "Tales of Romance." A series of historical dramatizations might be entitled, "Leaders in History," or "Heroes of History," and so on.

Types of Dramatic Shows

Radio dramatic shows can be divided into the following general classifications.

1. Historical drama

2. Thriller drama (mystery and detective; melodrama and adventure)
3. Romantic drama
4. Comedy drama
5. True-life drama
6. Short dramatic sketches (as "high spots" of musical programs)
7. Daily radio strip (two or more characters)

1. *Historical drama.* In building radio dramatic sketches which are entertaining and at the same time educational, the field of history has proved exceptionally fruitful. Historical material may be viewed from almost any angle; the same historical incident may furnish the basis for three or four different episodes in different series of programs.

First of all it is necessary to determine the general program title. Suppose, for example, that a continuity writer wishes to present a weekly series based on "Famous Events in History." This is the broadest possible dramatic treatment of history. Suppose the first event he selects is Nelson's victory at Trafalgar. A half-hour episode would be concerned with events leading up to the battle—Lady Hamilton would be featured in one scene—but the central plot would deal with the opposing battleships, the climax would be the battle and Nelson's death.

Then, let us suppose that the radio dramatist or a commercial sponsor conceives the idea of a historical series based on famous historical romances. Undoubtedly one of the famous love affairs chosen would be that of Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton. This same Battle of Trafalgar might figure in such a series, and yet the method of approach to the historical material would be totally

different. Early scenes featuring Nelson and Lady Hamilton would be dramatized, and if the actual battle scene were dramatized, it would only be to point the fact that Nelson died with Lady Hamilton's picture clutched in his hand.

Then suppose another radio writer or commercial sponsor wished to present a series entitled "Leaders of History" or "Great Men of the World." He would conceivably select Lord Nelson, but again the treatment of the Battle of Trafalgar and of Nelson himself would be totally different. Such a sketch would be built around Nelson's character—every scene used would be chosen to portray Nelson the leader, the hero. Lady Hamilton would be mentioned, but she would not occupy the important rôle she had in the series of "Famous Romances."

Hence, although Nelson and Lady Hamilton and the Battle of Trafalgar form the historical background of all three sketches, these sketches in different series would be widely dissimilar.

As another example of what can be done in adapting historical material for radio, we might have a series, built for an automobile manufacturer or a railroad, entitled "The Romance of Transportation." Such a series would dramatize every week events concerned with means of conveyance, starting back in the Stone Age and advancing through Roman chariots, covered wagons, etc.

Or, again, a manufacturer might wish research done for a series based on the history of science and invention. This would consist of human interest and dramatic moments in the lives of great inventors, and would, of course, include contemporary reaction to inventions which have proved invaluable. These are but a few illustrations

of methods of treating historical material for radio dramatic uses.

Sketches based on dramatic incidents of the Bible have also found unusual favor. Dramatic historical sketches have proved to be universally popular. History is so vague and distant to the majority of listeners that they enjoy hearing heroes of the past talk; if the interpretation of these characters is done after thorough research, such radio series prove not only entertaining but of wide educational appeal as well.

2. *Another type of drama which is peculiarly suited to radio is the "thriller."* This term is used in the broadest sense to include mystery and detective stories, melodrama, and adventure stories. The thriller drama is well suited to radio because it is comparatively easy to stimulate the imagination along "thriller" lines through the ear alone by employing sound effects, characteristic music, and distinctive, sinister voices. The very fact that the action must be imagined lends an additional appeal of mystery.

The opening of a typical radio mystery play has been illustrated at the beginning of this discussion.

3. *Love stories are always popular whether they are presented as fiction to be read, or as plays for stage presentation, adapted for movies, or written to be heard* via *radio.*

In planning a series of romantic radio sketches, the writer must decide whether it is to be a serial featuring the same principal characters every week, or whether it is to be a series of love stories with different plot and characters each week, tied together or unified by an all-inclusive program title. For instance, a title such as "Lover's Lane," featuring a series of marriage proposals in a particularly famous lover's lane, or proposals occurring in

Broadway restaurants in the heart of New York City. Every situation would be different from the previous week's, and yet there would be as a thread of unity in the series the fact that the proposal was made in a particular place.

If, on the other hand, the radio writer is planning a serial in which the interest and suspense are maintained by the aid of definite obstacles, such as obdurate parents or a wealthy and ingratiating villain, he will also find it advisable to introduce some other strong interest—perhaps adventure, mystery, or business life.

4. *Comedy drama.* Humor to be completely successful on the air must be broad. Subtle humor is rarely appreciated unless it is read. Broad types—for example, blackface comedians and dialect comedians "gagging" in familiar dialects, such as Irish, Jewish, and hick comedians—have achieved great popularity on the air. One difficulty with humor on the air before an unseen audience is that the radio comedian cannot pause for laughs—a second, perhaps, if he anticipates a laugh, but no longer. One pair of successful radio gag-men have such infectious laughs that each one laughs at the other's jokes, and hence supplies a natural pause after a joke. In this way the audience does not lose the opening lines of the next speech or joke.

Broad burlesques of history, or of familiar radio speakers and announcers are popular.

5. *True life drama.* Human interest sketches featuring the New York City delicatessen, the newsboy, the rural shopkeeper, the garage-mechanic, the business man and his secretary, the old-maid school-teacher, the traveling salesman, and, above all, sketches dramatizing the daily

doings of a typical American family are all peculiarly appropriate subjects for radio.

Radio listeners will recall several excellent series which have run without cessation once a week for two or three years. Listeners seated before the loud-speaker in their own homes enjoy characterizations of familiar types of real people—sketches which suggest the daily social life in the listener's own community, sketches which cause the listener to recognize and chuckle at foibles of his next-door neighbor, and which cause his neighbor to be equally amused.

6. *Short dramatic sketches* (as "high spots" of musical programs). As described above, one form of successful radio series is the weekly musical program of which the high spot is a four- to twelve-minute dramatic sketch usually placed about the center of the program. Such a brief sketch may be planned in accordance with a particular product if the series is commercially sponsored; it may be an amusing "black-out" sketch, or it may be a human interest sketch typical of a great city or of a rural community.

7. *Daily radio "strip."* Another form of dialogue show which has proved extremely popular with listeners is the daily fifteen-minute "strip," in which the same main characters are heard every week day. These strips may be either sustaining or commercial, and both types have made unusually great successes. Sustained listener-interest is more easily obtained in the fifteen-minute dramatic program, and, in addition, the increasing interest which is created from day to day and from week to week is bound to result in a much greater and more interested audience. Some of these programs are not heard every

week day. Some are broadcast two or three times a week; but even here, we have the parallel to the daily comic strip in newspapers.

The main characters in these strip broadcasts are of wide variety. Each one which has proved successful, however, appears to be distinctly human-interest entertainment of general appeal. In other words, married life may be the theme, with the husband and wife as the central characters or young married life, featuring the struggles of two newlyweds; two rural characters may be put through a series of adventures; two blackface characters may be the central figures, or a group of children, or any other two or three characters who are widely appealing, whose doings are interesting or humorous and whose dialogue can supply a well-balanced story which will build listener-interest from day to day and from week to week.

Naturally, every episode in such a series of broadcasts should be heard every day at the same hour. In this way listening to the series becomes a habit—a much more forceful habit than can be possible with any once-a-week program. Certainly it is simpler to remember to tune to Station XYZ at six-forty-five every night for the adventures of Tom and Dotty than it is to recall that once a week, on Wednesday night, at nine-thirty, Station HIJ is broadcasting one of the Brown and Brown mystery stories. It is difficult to make a habit of something you do only once a week. It is difficult *not* to make one out of an act you perform daily, even for a few days.

Although strip broadcasts are of wide and varying types, writing them involves the same principles as apply to every other sort of dramatic broadcast. In addition to the instructions which have been set forth for radio

drama in general, only three extra points apply exclusively to the preparation of strip scripts, and these have to do merely with the general routine of setting up plots and developing the story.

First, each episode, no matter what else it accomplishes, should be built as a complete episode. It is not logical to cater merely to those listeners who hear every broadcast in the series, disregarding the interest of those who listen only occasionally. If any single strip broadcast cannot be enjoyed with complete understanding by every listener, that strip series will find its audience gradually dwindling, for certain listeners will tire of it in time, and no others will have been developed to take their places. This finishing of each single plot episode in a single broadcast, therefore, is all-important.

Second, while every episode should be complete, every broadcast should also advance a larger plot than that around which each single broadcast is built. For want of a better name, let us call this secondary plot into which the single episode fits a "sub-theme" plot. This sub-theme plot must advance from day to day, and, by experiment, it has been found advisable to finish each sub-theme during the course of a week. The main reason for this is that the majority of strip series are heard every week day, with a day of rest between Saturday and Monday. Every Sunday provides a natural break, so that Saturday seems the logical time for ending each sub-theme plot, with a new sub-theme plot starting the following Monday.

Third, above each single episode plot and each sub-theme plot, there must be a main-theme plot into which each single episode and each week's sub-theme plot must fit. And just as each episode must advance the sub-theme

plot, so must each week's sub-theme plot advance the main-theme plot.

These three rules are generalities, but their applications are so easily understood that it seems useless to illustrate each one.

The "Flashback"

A favorite way of presenting a radio series of dramatized stories built on a general theme is by the establishment of two or more basic characters who, through a "flashback," present stories whose characters and plots are different every week.

Flashbacks used in straight dramatic programs (programs in which music plays a very small part) are of two general types. The first, in the sequence of its development and use in radio entertainment, is the two-character setting, with one character carrying the greater part of the narration and playing a leading part in the flashback story he is telling. The other character is utilized chiefly to make the original setting seem more real, to interrupt the narration between scenes so that it cannot grow monotonous, and to stress important facts in the narration to make them more vivid.

It might be well to reiterate that it is always necessary to leave things in motion at the end of every scene of a flashback script, either by starting sound effects which carry on the action, or by the lines of the characters. Thus the listener leaves the characters in a state of suspense. And he knows the flashback is coming. Also, directly after every flashback, all characters in the coming scene, whether they have been introduced before or not, must be identified, so that every listener may be sure who each character is at all times.

Another form of flashback technique, which has proved unusually successful in radio, is that in which the same characters are carried backward or forward in time, all actors appearing in both portions of the action.

Creation of Characters for Radio Drama

In creating characters for radio drama, it is necessary to choose broad types of people—types which can be readily recognized and visualized by all listeners. There are two main reasons for this: first, the lack of visual appeal to listeners; second, the tabloid form of radio drama.

There is little time in the average radio sketch for fine character drawing or for subtle character development. True, the plot of a dramatic broadcast may depend entirely upon character development rather than on action, but even in this case, the character development must be broad.

Radio drama is necessarily limited as to the number of characters which may be used. However, the same general rules apply to the composition of a basic cast for a radio dramatic sketch as apply to the composition of a cast for a full-length play. But in radio drama, the cast, as well as the plot and the lines, must be tabloided. There is no opportunity in radio to use a leading man and a leading woman, a juvenile and an ingénue, two character actors, a pair of comedians, a villain and his assistant, although his basic cast forms the foundation of many stage plays. In a radio drama, this same cast would probably consist of four or five actors—a leading ingénue, a leading juvenile, one character actor who also supplies the comedy element, and a villain, with the possibility of an assistant villain.

It may be found necessary to utilize two actors to furnish the villainous element, so that this menacing portion of the action can be exposed to the listening audience and kept secret from the other members of the cast, without the use of soliloquy on the part of the villain himself. For example, if the villain of a radio sketch is going to plant a time-bomb in the house of the hero, it will be impossible to play this scene without an assistant villain. The action of planting the bomb will be brought out in dialogue between the two villains during the time they are actually installing the bomb. On the stage, however, this action might well be registered by the villain alone without the use of any lines whatsoever.

As a general rule, six leading characters will be the maximum which can be utilized successfully in a fifteen-minute or thirty-minute radio sketch. More than this number will usually be confusing. For one thing, each voice must contrast effectively with the others, and when more than six voices are used, listeners are likely to become confused as to which character is speaking.

Several minor characters, however, may be included. Usually, it is not even necessary to name these. The general method of introducing these minor characters is to use generally recognized dialect voices, such as broad English, Irish, Dutch, Hebrew, Negro, Japanese, French, German, or some other dialect which the stage has already caused listeners to accept as the lingo of that nationality. In this way no confusion can arise with the voices of the leading actors; and if the minor characters are not named, there can be no possible mix-up.

The use of contrasting voices for the principal characters in a radio sketch is an extremely important factor in

enabling listeners to identify instantly which character is speaking. Thus, when two young men of about the same age are cast in the same sketch, one should speak quickly, the other slowly—or the voices should be of entirely different quality or of entirely different pitch. In addition to this identification, it will be found necessary to have the characters in a scene frequently address each other by name. At the opening of a scene, each character is usually identified twice in this manner by being addressed by name by another character. Then, during the remainder of the scene, one mention of each character's name every minute or so will be sufficient to enable the audience to know at all times just who is speaking.

In developing the action of a radio drama, it is best not to bring on the "stage" at any one time any more characters than are absolutely necessary. Dialogue between three people, provided the voices are well contrasted and frequently addressed by name, can be readily followed by listeners. But an attempt to write a scene in which six characters take part will probably not be successful.

However, if it is desired that six characters be in the same room conversing during the action of a scene in a radio sketch, the writer can easily handle the characters in small groups. For instance, the scene might open with a low-voiced conversation between two characters seated in one corner of the room. The microphone might then be shifted to another pair of characters, but some kind of "plant line," must be used: one of the first two characters might say, "I wonder what Tom and Margaret are talking about over there in the other corner." Then the voices of Tom and Margaret fade in, and in the first two lines each character addresses the other by name. In-

stantly, these two other characters are identified by listeners, and the fact that the microphone has been shifted is apparent to everyone.

Plot Construction for Radio Drama

Here again, it is not the authors' intention to discuss general dramatic plot construction, but rather to emphasize the important points in which plot construction for radio drama differs from plot construction for other forms of dramatic writing.

The first essential point of difference arises from the tabloid character of radio drama, which allows for little, if any, sub-plot. Stage plays, on the other hand, almost always embody sub-plot. For example, a tragedy written for stage presentation usually contains scenes of comedy relief. A straight drama often contains such scenes. Similarly, pathos is often injected into stage comedies. But the scenes have little connection with the main plot of the play. They do not help advance the general plot action in any way, but rather serve merely to heighten the effect of the drama through the contrast they create. In radio drama there is no time or opportunity for these separate scenes of contrasting emotion. But the effect of any radio drama can be heightened by their inclusion, just as any stage play can be. And these "contrast" scenes are sometimes written into radio drama by means of a clever twist of technique.

Instead of making the contrasting scenes separate, they are built directly into the main-plot action of the radio show. They advance the main plot and, at the same time, provide effective contrast to the other scenes of the drama. An example might be cited in a series of melo-

dramatic radio broadcasts, in which each episode carries the same principal characters through a single thrilling adventure. There would usually be two main characters in such a series—either a man and a girl, or two men. If each broadcast were a thirty-minute drama, probably it would contain four scenes. Three of these scenes would be intensely thrilling melodrama, while the fourth might well be broad comedy. But this comedy scene, while furnishing contrast, would also advance the plot action of the sketch by involving one of the two main characters.

Plots for radio dramatic sketches can never revolve around highly complicated action—that is, actual motion of characters or of properties. The reason is obvious—this complicated action cannot be registered in the minds of listeners by spoken lines and sounds.

However, plot action in radio drama can often be built around sound effects, provided the sound effects can be so routined that every slightest sound registers a definite image in listeners' imaginations and fits into its proper place in the whole sound routine—in other words, if the action which the sound effects are intended to convey is perfectly clear and builds a clear image in the minds of the audience.

The most successful radio dramas are those built on simple plots which establish a certain definite objective at the outset of the script and then move, complicated only by the natural plot obstacles, directly through to their final climaxes. Naturally, as in any other form of dramatic writing, every scene in a radio drama should rise to a minor climax, with the grand climax occurring just before the end of the final scene.

Settings for Radio Drama

In routining plots for radio sketches, it is well to consider carefully the setting in which each scene will be laid. Here is an opportunity for the radio writer to give full play to his imaginative powers. He may set the scenes of his sketch almost anywhere. He is not limited by the confines of a stage, or of the lense of a camera. His settings may be indoors, outdoors—in the heart of a civilized community, in the wildest regions of the uncivilized world —or in some mythical, fantastic locale which exists only in the writer's imagination.

But no matter where or what these settings may be, they must be capable of being reproduced in listeners' imaginations through sound effects, atmospheric music, very brief descriptive passages by the announcer, and incidental mentions in the dialogue of objects, colors, odors, and other sense impressions, such as heat or cold, dampness or dryness. Each setting must be easily imagined from the various fleeting suggestions which can be transferred to the listeners by words and sounds.

Methods of Establishing Lapse of Time and Change of Scene

There are three principal methods of separating the scenes in a radio drama—that is, establishing lapse of time and change of scene. The first and most obvious is using the voice of the announcer. At the conclusion of a scene, the announcer's voice is heard saying, "Early the next morning, Jack and Jane were seated in the living room of her father's house." The announcer continues with the details of the scene, and perhaps with what has happened since listeners heard the voices of Jack and Jane

in the preceding scene; and the action of the next scene begins with Jack and Jane carrying on dialogue.

The second method is the use of sound effects. In other words, instead of having the announcer's voice come in at the conclusion of a scene and describe a lapse of time and a new setting, a routine of sound effects may easily be used to close the first scene, establish a time-lapse and a change of scene, and set the next scene.

The third method is the use of interlude music between scenes. This playing of interlude music was one of the first conventions in radio drama and has by this time become as readily accepted by listeners as are the chapter headings in a novel.

Interlude music is indeed analogous to the chapter headings in books, or to the blank spaces which denote lapses of time or change of scene in short stories. Frequently, this interlude music heard between the scenes of a radio sketch is selected as being appropriate to the situation or to the locale of the sketch—but usually it has no connection with the sketch or the characters. It may be merely a popular song played between the scenes. However, it does serve to break the sequence of thought in listeners' minds. It tells every listener that one scene is concluded, and that another is about to begin. And because it is accepted generally by listeners as a convention, interlude music never sounds conspicuous or unrealistic.

All three methods of changing scenes may be used in various combinations. For instance, we may combine music and sound effects, or music and the voice of the announcer between scenes in a radio play.

Moreover, these three methods, singly or in combination, are also used to open the first scene of a radio sketch.

When music and sound effects, singly or in combination, are used either to open the first scene of a radio drama or to separate two scenes, it is necessary that the dialogue immediately following them contain the facts which the announcer would have stated if his voice had been used.

New and significant experiments are constantly being made in radio drama. And there is a constantly increasing demand for writers who know the fundamentals of radio writing and who have something new to offer. In this field there is almost unlimited opportunity for the development not only of writers but of truly creative writing.

—KATHARINE SEYMOUR AND
J. T. W. MARTIN

II. THE PLAY SCRIPT

WILLIAM ARCHER says in his book *Play Making* that there are no rules for writing a play. He means by this statement that every play is an individual composition differing from all other plays in either theme, purpose, treatment, or some combination of these and other elements; and that the only way to learn to write plays is to write plays, to rewrite them, and to continue writing them until one has developed one's own technique. With this understanding, and in spite of his pronouncement, let us endeavor to formulate a few principles which will help the novice to compose in the dramatic form.

The beginner finds his chief difficulty in getting started. Where shall he take hold of his material? How shall he begin? What kind of people shall he put in his play, and how shall he make them known to his audience? These and many other questions give him pause. Once started, however, he will find that there will be a kind of momentum which carries him along. If he can once overcome that first inertia which most writers have to combat, he will find his imagination seeking a characteristic means of expression.

Observation of the work of accepted playwrights seems to indicate that there are only *four different bases* from which a dramatist may proceed. First, he may be moved to project a period, a locality, an environment, or a group which is noteworthy for its dramatic values. Second, he may know—or imagine—some situation which is filled with dramatic possibilities. Third, he may envision a

character or group of characters of varied personalities and clashing wills. Fourth, he may have pondered some abstract theme or some general idea about human life or character. Any one of these is sufficient to make one's imagination explode into creative composition.

From whatever standpoint one starts, there are several important facts to keep in mind.

The drama is the most highly selective of all literary forms. First of all one must tell a complete story and give complete information about the characters in approximately two hours. This is in marked contrast with the novel, which can tell its story in any length from that of *Ethan Frome* to that of *Anthony Adverse*. Second, because the expenses of a play must be kept in mind, the cast of characters must contain no unnecessary personages and the scenes must be kept down to the smallest possible number. These limitations will suggest that the playwright must deal with the high points of the story only, and that the action and dialogue must be so significant as to make the audience feel that they are seeing all the details of the story and characterization presented before them. In any play there will be certain scenes which careful analysis of his material will show the playwright that he must include. These are called *scènes à faire*—scenes which *must* be put on. It is clear, therefore, that the dramatist is much more restricted than the novelist in the matter of time, movements, characters, scenes that he must include and conversation that he may record.

Every play like every other piece of narrative must be considered as to plot, characters, dialogue, and theme. Let us examine first the matter of plot. The terms "plot" and "story" should not be confused. "Plot" means the

essential conflict of wills or purposes which may be developed into a story by the use of incident, characters, and dialogue. Most plots may be reduced to the following formula:

A, The protagonist, desires to accomplish, get, or become B. He is opposed by the antagonistic forces C, D, E, etc. He is assisted by the friendly forces F, G, H, etc. The result (dénouement) is X.

It will be seen therefore that a successful play must contain a well-defined plot which begins swiftly, moves rapidly and steadily to the highest point of interest, after which it reaches swiftly a definite ending. A play slow in getting started fails to put its audience immediately in the right mood for the rest of the play. One which moves slowly in its development and fails to hold the interest of the audience by constantly heightening climaxes, will not maintain its place on the boards; and one which drags to its end will send the final curtain down on empty seats. A play which allows its audience to ruminate about the earliest train it can get out of town is a guaranteed failure.

Let us see how experienced playwrights manage to construct their stories with proper movement and emphasis, keeping the scenes in their proper proportions. Augustus Thomas said that in his case a play incubated for about two years; when he had it all worked out in his mind he wrote it in about six weeks; and he did his revising after the play went into rehearsal. Another playwright who works his story out as he writes said that he rewrote the first act of his best play forty times, the second act ten times and the last act twice. The late Professor George P. Baker of the famous 47 Workshop was a firm believer in the *scenario*, especially for the inexperienced writer. The

scenario may be defined as the blocking out of the scenes and the sketching in of characters and dialogue. To illustrate, the following might easily have been the essence of a scenario from which Louis N. Parker wrote *A Minuet.*

Scenario of *A Minuet*

Main idea: Noblesse oblige.
Time: during "The Terror."
Place: a room in the Conciergerie
(furniture and props to be worked out in detail).
Characters: A noble, his former wife, gaoler.
Marquis is reading aloud from Voltaire
(find appropriate lines)
He ceases reading, lays book aside, rises, and walking to and fro comments on the fact that Voltaire's words have helped him to face the guillotine serenely.

Gaoler enters

After an exchange of remarks on their respective fates, the Gaoler announces that a woman waits to see the prisoner.

(Block in dialogue between Gaoler and Marquis)

Marquis wonders who his caller is and goes over in his mind the possibilities. In a moment the lady enters. It is his wife.

A dialogue of much superficial elegance and wit follows, which makes clear why the Marquis and his wife have been separated—he jealous of her power over men. Finally he rises in dismissal.

"This prison is no place for you. Farewell!"

"The room is ugly. I prefer my cell."

"Your—cell?"

"Of course. I am a prisoner too. That's what I came for."

"What?"

"To die with you."

There follows reconciliation, mutual understanding, and tender reminiscences of their happy young love.

The Gaoler interrupts them

"You twain

Aristocrats, the tumbril waits!"

Marchioness (sways a little) "Ah me!"

Marquis (eagerly) "Is there a heaven, Doris?"

Marchioness (smiles bravely, holds out her hand as if in the Minuet) "Come and See."

As the Marquis takes her hand

Curtain.

Only such characters should be included in the play as are absolutely needed for the development of the plot conflict. These characters must be portrayed in such a way as to be absolutely clear and acceptable. They must be, as we say, convincing, because the force of the play is lost if the spectator does not understand why the personages act as they do, or if he is not made to believe that they would act in real life as they do in the play. Again, the difficulty of the playwright's problem is to make these characters portray themselves by what they say and what they do, without making them say or do anything which they would not say or do in real life. Of course in real life most of us do not go about wearing our hearts on our sleeves or proclaiming our secret feelings to the world. Yet the playwright must somehow contrive to make his characters convey their feelings and motives in a way

which the audience will accept as true to life. In this respect again the playwright is infinitely more restricted than the novelist, because where the novelist may enter his story in the form of description or explanation, the playwright must project his characters, make them stand on their own feet and explain or portray themselves.

The playwright must know much more about his characters than he intends to use. It would be well for the ambitious young playwright to study the notebooks of the great dramatist, Henrik Ibsen, who, when he was preparing a play, went back into the very infancy and youth of his characters. He is quoted as saying in explanation of an action of one of his mature characters, "All that is accounted for by an illness which she had when a child." It would be a help to the beginner, even before writing his scenario, to write out the biography of his various personages for the sole purpose, of course, of getting to know their histories, the development of their characters, and all the influences and experiences which might have influenced their motives. Finally it is inexcusable to include characters merely for comic relief. They are an affront to the most elementary rule of composition—*unity of effect.* The skillful playwright finds his comic relief in those characters who are an integral part of the play. An excellent example of such artistry is to be found in *The Music Master*, a play in which the chief character made us laugh while we wept.

The dialogue of a play is again an example of highly selective writing. The best dramatic dialogue is terse, nervous, and vital. Galsworthy says, "Good dialogue is character. It is also action." Augustus Thomas, dean of American playwrights, declared, "Every bit of dialogue should accomplish one or more of the following results:

it should advance the story, promote the characterization or get a laugh. If by chance it should do all three, it is one of those supreme moments in a dramatist's life." Merely literary dialogue—that is, extended speech which exists only for its own grace and beauty—is in modern drama strictly taboo for the reason that it is not true to life. We do not go around delivering lectures to people. We speak in broken sentences, in suggestive phrases, which our hearer receives, interrupts, perhaps, and replies to in his turn. But note this paradox: if we were to select any conversation, and transfer that very conversation accurately to the stage, it would give the impression of unreality. Why? The purpose of the drama is not to present real life, but to present the *illusion* of reality, *to project life*, as it were, so that one perceives cause leading to effect; so that one may understand the motivation of character and incident. Such a presentation requires in both dialogue and action a subtly conceived *unreality* which shall create for the audience an *illusion* of reality. Even in such ordinary matters as walking, sitting down, standing up, the player must perform the acts exaggeratedly in order that he may not seem to mince, or slump, or drag himself to his feet. Let me illustrate further: suppose in your play you wish a scene of an afternoon tea. Thinking to simulate reality, you go around to several afternoon teas given by your various friends. You take a stenographer with you and let him transcribe the various conversations exactly as he hears them. You combine them into a scene in your play. It will take at least an hour to present it. It will be full of the banalities and repetitions which one hears at all teas; and the audience will find it tiresome and *not true to life.*

How, then, shall one present an afternoon tea so that

it will seem true to life? The answer is, by limiting it to fifteen minutes in length, selecting the dialogue and action with the greatest care to bring out in the scene only those points of story, character, and theme that are important to the development of the play as a whole.

The dramatist has to be relentless with himself in this matter of dialogue. It is so easy to write speeches which are graceful and clever, and so humorous that one says to one's self, "Ah, that is good!" But it is well always to distrust the speeches which are one's favorites because they are quite likely to be useless for the purposes of the play. A well-known dramatist and critic tells a story on himself which has bearing on this point. He had one very long monologue in his play which he liked very much. After his play had been put into rehearsal, the playwright was present one day. The leading actress, a woman of great experience, began the author's pet speech; but when she had reached about the middle of it, she stopped, raised her hands in despair, and exclaimed, "I am sorry Mr. — but I can't go on. The speech is too long. I feel I am carrying the whole play on my shoulders. You will have to cut these lines."

"But," said Mr. —, "I can't cut that. Why, that is the most important thing in my whole play; it is my best speech." "I'm sorry," said the leading lady, "but the speech is too long." So the playwright sorrowfully took his manuscript, worked over it that night, and the next day returned with his cherished speech cut in half. The same episode occurred three separate days. To make a long story short, when the play was finally produced, the speech was reduced to one line and a gesture.

One easy way to become familiar with the various

approaches to dramatic composition would be to analyze carefully four different types of plays. First for the problem or thesis plays, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, by Sir Arthur Wing Pinero, or *A Doll's House*, by Henrik Ibsen. *Magda*, by Sudermann, is a type which presents a dominant character in conflict with other characters in his environment. *The Gay Lord Quex*, by Pinero, and *Charley's Aunt*, that famous old farce, are plays dealing with a central situation which contains dramatic possibilities. *Riders to the Sea*, by John M. Synge, is a perfect type of fate tragedy. In each of these plays we observe a different starting point; yet in each the dramatist has endeavored to tell a story by projecting personages who act out themselves, and talk as they must talk. In one play he emphasizes a truth, in another a dominant character, in another a situation, and in the last a sense of an overwhelming force against which human beings struggle in vain and to which they can only submit with resignation.

One other fact, and this a very important one, must the young playwright keep in mind. It is not the *kind of material* which determines the classification of the play. It is the *author's attitude* toward his material. Three different playwrights might take the same substance; one would turn out a tragedy, another a melodrama, and a third a comedy, depending upon what values each saw in the play material, and how he emphasized them. Let me illustrate: I have a pet dog. I look out my window to see that a young imp of a boy has tied a tin can to the tail of my dog, and let him loose. I see my dog dart off pursued by this noisy, unaccountable enemy. In his terror he performs all kinds of contortions. The tin can bangs from side to side. I rush down the stairs bent on rescue. In

his terror my dog, oblivious of traffic, runs across the street. I expect to see my pet ground under the wheels of some hit-and-run driver. I pursue him. Brakes squeal, drivers curse. Eventually I grasp him to my bosom, safe but breathless and trembling. The little boy has seen the rapid movement, has felt the excitement; and he has taken a devilish delight in his power to create this exciting scene. It is comedy or melodrama to him. To me and my pet, dominated by love and fear, it may be tragedy. Thus it is seen that the playwright's attitude toward his material, and the values which he emphasizes determine the nature of his play. Playwriting then becomes a matter of selection; selection of theme, of material, of characters, of dialogue, and especially of emphasis.

—Alice Howard Spaulding

III. IF YOU MUST WRITE FOR THE MOVIES

WHEN a new author seeks advice about writing for motion pictures, the simplest and perhaps the most helpful answer is: "Don't attempt it! Get your novels and short stories published, or your plays produced on Broadway; then, if they are distinguished by physical or mental action, they will sell to the film companies without further effort from you. They will sell, it may be added, for much higher prices than the so-called 'original' commands."

An "original" is a story written directly for screen use. It is generally offered in the form of a detailed synopsis of from ten to fifty pages. The present or the past tense can be employed in such a synopsis; but the present tense is more generally liked because of its vividness, and it is good to insert bits of effective dialogue. By no means should an amateur try to construct a technical continuity: a long script of pages vertically divided down the middle, with dialogue on one side and parallel stage directions on the other. This complicated working-script from which the actual screen play is shot is always turned out by studio staff-writers after the purchase of the story.

The market for originals is limited. Most major film companies will not receive them for reading unless they come recommended by a reputable agent. There are always a few exceptions to this rule; the smaller independent firms, which are less able to pay high prices, are more receptive to such work.

When the big companies refuse unsolicited material, they have definite reasons for doing so. In the first place, covering the output of unknown authors rarely pays.

"Covering" is an expensive process involving a good deal of office overhead (secretarial and filing work), as well as the payment which goes to an experienced reader for a critical synopsis. When one accepted script out of a thousand is an excellent average, it can readily be seen that the waste of time and money is tremendous.

The second reason why many companies refuse such material is the absurd but ever-present danger of lawsuits. One crank can thus ruin the opportunity of countless honest writers. For example, the crank may submit a brief, possibly illegible, story about a country newspaper. The story is read and returned to him; a short synopsis with "not recommended" typed on it remains in the company's files. Such a synopsis gets no farther than the editor's assistant, who acts as a sort of wastebasket, sees that no important executive is bothered with reading the story, and in turn promptly forgets it. Six months or so later, the same company may put out a picture in which the action revolves round a country newspaper. The crank starts a plagiarism suit, and again time and money are wasted before the affair is settled. That is why unsolicited originals are often returned, with printed rejection slips which—courtesy and all—have been drawn up very carefully by the film company's legal department. The above hypothetical case may sound fantastically overdrawn, but motion pictures are a fantastic business, and such suits have occurred more frequently than the average writer would believe.

The bulk of originals sold is of Hollywood authorship, because local writers generally know the picture business and the kind of stories popular at any given time, and local agents are in close touch with the studios and can

cater at a moment's notice to a producer's need for a certain type of drama or a certain star vehicle. Thus a story, which in itself is only fair, may be worth purchase at a low price, because what it has to say finds a spot on a production schedule. But new writers should remember that such a sale requires an intimate knowledge of the industry; amateur work of no promise will not find a market anywhere.

The reason why most originals prove unsalable applies sometimes to established authors—well-known novelists and playwrights—as well as to amateurs; it does *not* apply to trained staff technicians who have successfully begun to free-lance. Suppose a man gets a good dramatic idea. If he develops it for a publisher or producer, he knows that he must give it infinite care, expending all the resources of his talent on plot, characterization, dialogue, and small detail. If, however, he decides that he wants to make quick and easy money through a motion picture sale, what does he do? Possibly believing that everything he writes will be changed anyhow, he sets down his rough idea in a few pages, carries the plot from high point to high point with no sense in between, and neglects motivation, characterization, fine small samples of dialogue, and the little atmospheric details which often give a trite story the semblance of freshness and distinction.

Again and again, a reader reports that the plot of an original is "full of holes." He is referring to the hasty writing, the great American desire to get something for nothing. Nor are the film companies particularly amenable to an author's note stating that the idea will be developed by him if the editors like it. A real estate firm does not show a purchaser a few boards and nails and

bricks, promising to build them into a house if the purchaser thinks them attractive; a complete plan of the house is forthcoming, or the purchaser does not buy.

Film companies sometimes publish the statement that they are in the market for "ideas." They mean what they say; good ideas are hard to get, although the printed output of two continents is combed for them constantly. But the new writer fails to realize how scarce a really original idea is. A plot which seems unheard-of to him is probably incorporated into dozens of synopses now smoldering in any collection of files. A weary reader sums it up as "Just another G Man or Good-Bad-Girl melodrama,"—or whatever the great idea may prove to be. And an editor's assistant can remember three times the number of type examples that any reader recalls.

If a new writer *must* direct his talents toward motion pictures, let him first find out which companies will receive and read his work. A literate letter to any company will bring an answer. It is wiser, however, and more expedient to get in touch with a good agent, who will be glad to push the work if it has real value. This writer should be, before he sets a word on paper, a film fan with a wide knowledge of current screen productions. Then, probably the best thing for him to do is to select a certain star and try to weave a story about that star's personality. Stars are harder to find stories for than any layman outside of the industry would suppose. For the character actors and actresses it sometimes proves impossible for months on end to discover the proper vehicle. Here, though, is where originals usually fail: they will offer a glove-fitting character for Charles Laughton or Mary Boland, but the story surrounding the character will be too weak to use.

A few universal "don'ts" come readily to mind and may prove helpful. *Don't* try to break into the present-day motion picture field with a routine period or costume story. A man called at a scenario department in New York one summer several years back and said that as Cecil B. De Mille was filming *The Sign of the Cross*, he had brought along a five-page drama about the signing of the Magna Charta! It was pointed out to him: (1) that De Mille, veteran maker of spectacles, is a law unto himself; and (2) that almost anyone knows about the struggles of the early Christians in Rome, whereas the average picture-goer has forgotten Magna Charta if he ever heard of it. The period story today has more place upon the screen than it used to have; but it is very expensive to make, and it needs the prestige of a classic or a bestseller or hit-play to bring in large enough audiences to show a profit. The film fan on the whole still prefers modern society stories with the "glamour" of handsome sets and costumes, or themes exploited dramatically in the daily press.

Don't, on the other hand, concoct your own version of a theme enjoying momentary popularity unless your personal background gives you inside knowledge of it. The cycles of gangster pictures, prison pictures, and political pictures come and go. A theme repeated too many times by experts is sufficiently distressing. Copied by an inexperienced writer with no grasp of the subject in hand, it becomes a hopeless parody. *Don't* attempt to make good fiction out of facts with which you are unacquainted.

Don't set down the story of your tragic life and tell a film company what a masterpiece it is because it happened to you. Use your life if you must, but conceal its truth in fiction form, and let that fiction stand upon its own merits.

Above all, let no author—inexperienced or experienced —"write down" to motion pictures! They may be a business, a money-earning institution which can justly be ridiculed for its foibles; but they are also something else. They are the new drama of the machine age, the most fluid and plastic form of theatrical expression ever yet invented; and they are probably the finest means of *telling a story* which the world has found. They combine, within themselves, the scope of a novel and the subjective emotion of a play. They are the book and the illustrations, too. They are still young and often faulty, and the people who manage them have not always been inspired. Each year, however, the leadership comes into more capable hands.

There is, today, a new courage about innovations, a new willingness to risk departures from the hackneyed, "sure-fire" themes. Actors are better; settings and sound are better; color is coming in. Motion pictures are developing into a powerful art; and they deserve to be speeded on the way by the best that any writer has to give. He can reach them more easily through the channels of the publishing house or the stage; but, if he must appeal to them directly, let him do it with all the fire at his command.

—Doris F. Halman.

UNIT SIX

REVISING, EDITING, AND PROOF-READING PROBLEMS

I. REVISING THE MANUSCRIPT

REVISION is nearly as important as creation in the production of manuscript material; yet until an author becomes a professional, he seems seldom to appreciate this fact. For the beginner there are three obstacles to efficiency in any revising he undertakes: (1) sheer laziness; (2) fear that emendation may destroy the vital spark of the story; and (3) lack of information regarding the process of revision. These points I shall take up in order.

1. The patience which the writer exercises in doing the first draft of his story must be continued without diminution in all future labors upon the script. Once the story has been born in rudimentary fashion, many a tired writer, either then or a little later, simply glances superficially over the pages, makes a few casual corrections, re-types the whole, and sends it to the editor. To put in a bit of punctuation here, to add an omitted word there, to cross out some patently incorrect expression still farther on, and thereafter consider that the revision is complete is the apotheosis of inertia and the beginning of the collapse of all standards. No author who feels he "hasn't the time" to spend long hours working over the second (or even forty-second) draft of his yarn can expect other than slipshod work to result.

Few of us are Arnold Bennetts, whose original script of the *Old Wives' Tale*, now in the British Museum, shows every page perfect in its neat, tiny longhand, just as it came to the editor spotless from the author's study. How many authors have their creative and expressional faculties so attuned, so ready before the actual business of

writing that they can depend upon a story's being born complete, full-grown, and correct?

Laziness, therefore, is one of the first weaknesses for a writer to rout out of his system; literary discipline demands his staying with the yarn until it satisfies every norm dictated by his integrity. He will not take a chance upon what he merely hopes is a fact; he will not blink a bad passage because the changing of it may upset the remainder of the tale. He will, if necessary, throw away the whole thing, rather than break faith with his readers for lack of truth or quality. He will, in other words, be a genuine *craftsman* with the sort of pride in his work which will not permit an article to leave his shop until it is as perfect as it is humanly possible for him to make it. Thus he will let a deadline pass, rather than present second-rate stuff. Thus he will even break a contract if it requires of him anything but top-flight writing. He will, in a word, be spurred out of the false comfort of laziness by the proddings of his artistic conscience.

2. Many persons seem to believe that too painstaking revision will bring about a dimming or extinguishing of the creative spark which animates every good story. I believe, personally, that if the spark be a real one in the first place, its dynamic quality will continue to electrify the piece, however much a conscientious author works over it. Like a new-born child, the vitality of a living piece of fiction is tremendous. It will resist with a thousand immunities almost any destructive force that assails it. If an author really knows what he is about, if the tests to which he puts his material are legitimate and properly intended, they will never do anything but improve (usually by a reduction in quantity) the quality of the project.

Given, then, a militant artistic conscience to defeat the subversive forces of inertia, and the belief that revision will improve rather than damage every first draft of a story, the writer is ready to take up the methods of revision.

3. The word revision means, of course, *seeing again*, and the author who wishes to see his work again—but from a coldly objective point of view—must put sufficient time between the moment of completing the first draft and the reading of it. This gives his primary creative enthusiasm a chance to cool to a correct detachment. Do not, therefore, attempt to reread (with the idea of revising) any manuscript immediately after its original has been finished. At least a day should intervene, and, in most cases, a week is preferable before the "critical eye" can replace the "creative eye." When, at the end of the cooling-off period, the author is ready to read his script with the right objectivity, he must bear in mind that this first reading should be fairly cursory; it should be undertaken from the standpoint of the magazine or book reader. This means that the reading should be done from the angle of *interest*, not *criticism*. Hence in the first reading the author should decide whether he has met the interest demands exactly as he planned. While going through the text he may set down a few of the principal points of dullness, and, having finished the yarn, turn back to page 1 to analyze the script for its basal narrative mechanics.

During this next reading, he tests the *emphasis* of the tale. If plot is of chief importance, every plot-unit will be scrutinized and challenged. Making this appraisal, the author may annotate the margins or interlineate his corrections. If he finds a scene out of place, he should either

mark the point where it should be inserted, or actually clip it out with shears and paste it in where it belongs. This sometimes shifts the order of other scenes, which will, in turn, be cut apart from the text and refitted accordingly. But the author's job is to make that plot absolutely airtight, however much he may have to slash the manuscript into strips and ribbons.

If the story stress is upon characterization, this should be coldly examined first, regardless of obvious defects in plot and background which will be got at later.

In this case, again, the author will keep narrative purpose uppermost in his mind. But here his job is to make the growth of the central character and of the lesser actors reach the stature and personality demanded by the story objective. If a minor character seems to run away with the yarn, the author must then decide whether that character may not really be as important or even more important than the original chief actor. If he believes honestly that this is so, he should not attempt to patch the script, but set it aside and write a new yarn with the focus of interest upon the previously subordinated figure. Not infrequently in fiction an apparently minor personality will "steal the story." This should not be permitted; it obscures the angle of narration and confuses the reader.

If the emphasis is to be laid upon atmosphere and background, these story units should, of course, take precedence over attention to character and plot in the author's first revisional analysis. He must check the accuracy of his facts and the continuity of the fabric into which these facts are woven. Here, sometimes, real research may have to begin—research which often takes far longer than all

the rest of the time spent on the yarn to date. But the author may suddenly realize as he reads his sketch of the background of some remote community that to give his yarn the full dramatic color of his setting, he must dig out further items regarding its geography, topography, climate, local fauna and flora, social and economic customs, and other information peculiar to that place. While creating the yarn originally, he perhaps glossed over these elements simply to complete the general outline of the narrative while it was "hot." Now his conscience will require the filling out of the picture with details which may remove the moment of finishing the final draft until some months from then. It is not at all unlikely that this might have been foreseen by the writer if he had made adequate preliminary preparation.

Through this second (and critical) reading and all those thereafter, the writer will be perpetually on the alert for taboos which may upset the quality of the surrounding yarn and make it unsalable. It is taken for granted that the author, meanwhile, checks the script for the fundamental mechanics of writing—grammar, rhetoric, and basal rules of composition. *He must not leave this job to the editor!* These rules have considerable bearing upon the author's style. Evaluating every word, phrase, and sentence for mechanical accuracy, he will make certain that each is in precisely the right thought and dramatic order; he will make sure that he has not used two expressions where one will do; and, on the other hand, he will not reduce to a gesture (simply for the sake of condensation) sections of the script which may have as their primary purpose the building of atmosphere or sustaining of pace.

But this he should keep in mind: until he has recaptured something of his original creative mood, he must not attempt large sections of actual rewriting; otherwise these may break with the style of the whole narrative. Such a break means a patch, and the mending is instantly detected by every reader who unconsciously from that moment on begins to lose confidence in the author's ability to carry him on a rising tide of interest to the promised consummation of the objective.

After completing his second reading for mechanical faults, and having made a few notes about them, the author then immediately starts rebuilding the narrative. He will find ways of improving his improvements as he goes along, although now and then he may return to an expression in his first draft, finding that he has been unable to say it any better. After patiently reconstructing and retyping his manuscript, the writer may this time reread the yarn without delay. He will, however, as before, read the piece first for interest and a second time for criticism: Then if he still finds errors to be routed out, he will make yet another revision and another and still another until he knows in his heart that he has done the very best work he can.

But suppose he is not even then satisfied with the results? Let him put the story aside, turn to something else, and permit a month, six months, or even a year pass. He may, when next he takes up the script to read, see precisely what is awkward and be able perhaps to change it accordingly. If it still seems wrong, he may as well throw it away. Writers should be warned that it is better to move to the creation of some other fiction piece after a certain time than to hack away perpetually at something which

does not yield to editing. The creative impulse must not be restrained too long while the author attempts to answer the standards of a misunderstood artistic conscience. He should revise as the dictates of quality (and editors) urge, but he must not spend a lifetime carving worthless cherry-stones when he might be building something of significance and value.

"When Horace laid down the famous rule that the author should let his work lie for nine years in his desk, he ought at the same time to have left him the recipe for living nine years without food," said Heine many years ago, and that truth has lost none of its impact for the modern writer.

II. EDITING THE MANUSCRIPT

IT IS an editor's duty to cut when necessary, to call forward and to inspire when a writer's initiative is low, and in time of stress to suggest that very title which will give a fillip to the whole. Remember Michelangelo's fine saying, "The more the marble wastes, the more the statue grows." Remember the lady who complimented a bishop on his sermon, but added that she thought it was a bit too long. "Madam, I did not have time to make it shorter." We are all of us addicted to long-windedness, and it usually takes our wives or some other patient first-reader to tell us so. I have known of autobiographical notes which ran to nearly 800,000 words, but which were breathed on by a capable editor and came out a readable book of one-eighth the size. I have known where small omissions amounting in all to but 3,000 words were a means of shifting sentimentality into true feeling. Have patience with the editor if he wants you to leave out things: he is probably right.

Or, let us suppose that a good title is missing. I recall a short story submitted, then sent back for revision; resubmitted and returned for still other alterations. On its third call, it was accepted. All during this process it was known as "The Dago Pig Episode," for that was what the author called it. But when it was published, it was *Pigs Is Pigs*, and the editor had done the christening!

Nothing tempts an editor quite so much as the possibility of revision. Again and again I have come upon book manuscripts—stiff, crude, ungainly, or extravagant —manuscripts which on the surface deserve rejection,

yet within which is source material whose genuine promise gleams through the verbiage. If the whole thing could only be taken to pieces and then put together again (by some power other than the author's), what a book we should have. "Had we but world enough and time . . .!" In such cases I should much prefer to write a letter of frank criticism, rather than of polite evasion, were it not that the first course is likely to get me into trouble. If a manuscript has seriously interested me, I shall probably take notes about it, and if these point to a disappointing conclusion, they may also show where and why the story has gone off the track.

Should these be embodied in the letter of rejection? In the *Atlantic's* office the legend persists of how Mr. Page struggled to reform the work of a feminine contributor who made the grade once, but never again. Not from any lack of trying or revision. Mr. Page would offer suggestions, the lady would revise and revise; he would expostulate and she exasperate, but to no avail. He once threatened to spank her, yet even then the result was no better than tears. Thus an editor sadly concludes from his experience that a book, declined and then revised by the author at his suggestion, in seven cases out of ten will probably fail to overcome the original objection. Yet always he remembers the exception when the improvement produced a national success.

And there is a third factor: the time and industry which are represented in the writer's work, and out of respect for which something more than a noncommittal reply is due. In the face of such circumstances I think the rejection should be as specific as the interest warrants. If the editor holds little hope for the manuscript, he need only

mention the main objections to it; if, on the other hand, he believes that it might perhaps be salvaged, he should be specific even to chapter and page. The writer must understand that he is undertaking a revision with no definite assurance of acceptance; yet, even so, I think he will generally take the gamble. Writers, it seems to me, are hard put to it for impartial and experienced advice.

I have said that if a manuscript interests me seriously, if it absorbs me to such an extent that I foresee its publication, I shall probably take notes about it. These notes will aim to detect such phrasing as is not well fitted to the substance, and they may run down technical misstatements and those repetitions of certain favorite words which have a way of escaping even the most scrupulous writers. More important still are the following responsibilities which, in varying degree, are met with in almost any publishable manuscript:

1. *Episodes which are incredible.* Invariably an author will defend such incidents by declaring that they actually happen. But that is not the point: they must assume the air of reality in print. Episodes that stretch the reader's credulity to the breaking point can usually be mended by omitting extravagant details.

2. *Loose ends.* Many an author has a habit of turning away from his episodes before their conclusions are fully understood by the reader. The editor should, accordingly, indicate those paragraphs which need amplifying.

3. *Identification of characters.* In long books having a large personnel, the author may reintroduce the names of people whom the reader has forgotten since first they were mentioned. A reminder of their identification must, therefore, be inserted.

4. *The threat of libel.* Through the mouths of his characters the author may say some harsh things about living people and institutions. Will they stand the test of law? Libel suits are seldom worth the notoriety and expense involved.

5. *Slang and colloquialisms.* They must be timely. Whether they appear in the author's introspection or in the character's dialogue, they must not be used in advance of their actual currency. No Victorian ever said, "This is a lousy play!"

6. *Improprieties.* In much modern fiction there will likely be passages a shade lurid, passages of overdetermined brutality, passages whose sexuality or plain animal husbandry are meant to hit you between the eyes. Shall they be preserved as they stand, or should they be glossed over? An editor is likely to follow his instinct, which at its best is synonymous with good sense.

7. *Manuscripts too long for their own good.* In which case the extraneous flesh should be cut away, more often in paragraphs than in pages, and always so as not to cut main arteries. *The House of Exile*, *Grandmother Brown's Hundred Years*, *Forty-Niners*—each of them was reduced by a total of between 20,000 to 30,000 words.

You may think I am implying a sense of infallibility on the part of the editor, which I do not intend. I know of too many cases of mistaken judgment even to have that kind of stiff neck. My hope is that where one publisher misses the promise in a manuscript, another will be almost sure to detect it. In any case, as between author's agents, teachers of composition, and enthusiastic friends, I would take the publisher's word as the least partial.

—Edward Weeks.

III. PROOF AND PROOFREADING

AUTHORS of magazine fiction have little reason to be concerned with proof and proofreading. Except under unusual circumstances the average author turns over his story manuscript to the editor and neither sees nor hears anything about the yarn until it appears all neatly printed in the publication. With writers of books it is quite another thing. Far from being done with his script when he hands it to his publisher, the book author faces at least two and sometimes three struggles with the volume before it arrives printed and bound to be shown to his friends.

There are three kinds of printer's proofs: galley, page, and cast proof. Of these, few authors see more than the first two. A galley is a slip of cheap paper half a dozen inches or so wide and anywhere from two to three feet long. Two weeks to a month from the time the editor tells the author that his book is being set up, the first batches of galley proof will arrive at the writer's home with a letter from the editor telling him to read the proof carefully but rapidly and return it at once to the publishers. The author will discover in the package not only two copies of this galley proof but also that section of his manuscript which coincides with the printed matter. One of the galley proof copies the author is to keep. The other one he is to make corrections on and send back with the original typewritten manuscript which accompanied it.

It is unlikely that the first galleys the author receives will cover the complete text of the book: perhaps only

the first quarter, third, or half will have been set up. The author will find when he sits down to examine the proof that it represents the text set in page width but not in page length. The material will run unbroken—save for the paragraphing or chaptering—to the bottom of the galley. The writer should place beside the galley he is considering the appropriate manuscript page and, word by word, line by line, check that printed material against the typewritten page for every sort of error. Missing or fragmentary words, misspellings, mispunctuations, lack of punctuation, inverted type or broken letters, irregularity of type alignment—all these possible errors should be caught by the author if he is conscientious. He must remember, however, that this first proof is only the first; that there are likely to be mistakes made not only by the editor and printer but by himself. These must be routed out.

He will discover when he begins his reading that there are already certain errors which have been noted by someone else. He may find one checked with a blue pencil, another with a green or red. If the printer, proofreading the material before sending it to the editor, has found mistakes and has marked them, let us say, with a blue pencil, the green or red corrections will have been added by the editor's proofreader. The author, in making his emendations, should use a pencil of yet another color so that identity of his marks may be known. When he does not understand some of the corrections that have been made by previous proofreaders, he should write "query" beside the questioned section, and, if he feels that it is rather important, he should state his inquiry in detail there in the margin. The author should be warned, how-

ever, that he is not to take this opportunity to rewrite his book in the multiplicity of text changes he now feels he would like to make. If there are glaring errors in expression or fact, or possibilities of misinterpretation, he should certainly mark these places and type on a slip of paper which he will attach to the galley at that point, the new matter he wishes substituted. He will not add to the text, though, or make any sweeping rearrangement of it. Typesetting costs money and every single change from a comma to a whole line or paragraph is an expense to the publisher.

The average book is set in linotype or monotype. The linotype machine does what its name indicates—it sets a whole line of type and casts it in a single metal slug. This means that if the author decides to change even as little a mark as a period, the whole original line must be thrown away and another line reset. It can readily be seen that much correction on the proof will rapidly run up a large bill with the printer. Monotype machines set a single letter at a time and when a whole line has been so set, the letters are still separate units. The cost and bother, therefore, of making any changes in monotype-set proof is considerably less than with linotype. But the monotype is a slower machine and is accordingly more costly and few books of the novel type are set with it. Atop of each galley will often be found the expression "lino" or "mono" along with the name of the book (usually briefed), the typesetter's name, the galley number and date. The author is thus able to discover for himself how the book is being set and in the matter of correction he can judge whether any errors he checks will be inexpensive or costly. He should keep in mind always that the addition or ex-

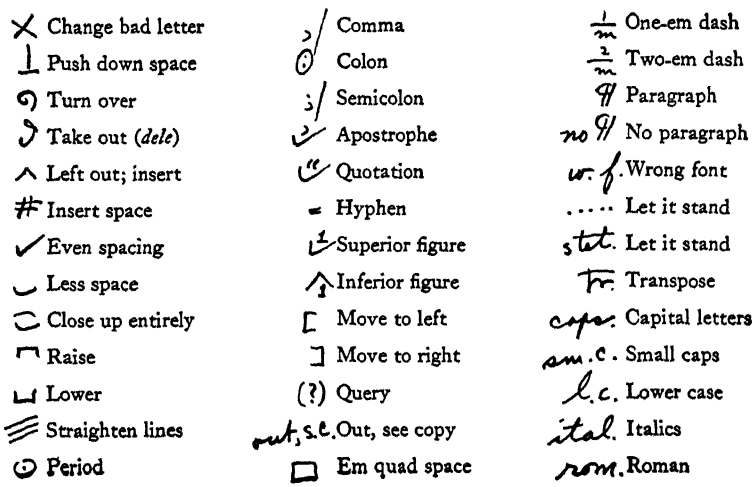
cision of punctuation or words will likely change the length of the printed lines and make it necessary, sometimes, to reset a whole paragraph. Caution and common sense must guide him in this editing.

After the author has made whatever emendations he believes are required upon the proof, he should send the corrected galley copies marked (usually) "A" along with the appropriate section of the manuscript back to—not the printer—the editor. A few weeks after all the galley proof has come in and been read and returned to the editor by the author, the first batches of "page proof" will arrive. This page proof is again on the same size and kind of paper slips as that used for the galleys. The difference is that now the text has been broken up into pages—usually three pages to a galley—the page numbers, called "folios," and the book or chapter titles, called "running heads," have been added, and the whole thing begins to assume the appearance it will later have. Now the author repeats the same careful reading on the page proof that he gave the galley proof. The manuscript is not returned for this operation. The author checks the page proof against the galleys which come with it. When he has finished reading and has mailed back (insured) the page proof, his work is, except in extraordinary cases, done. When next the story comes to his desk it will be bound between boards and be really a book.

In rare instances, the writer will be asked to check the page proof against "cast proof." Cast proof is the proof pulled from "plates" made out of the page proof type cast in permanent form. This reading of cast proof is sometimes required when special composition has included groups of figures or other statistics which are important

enough to demand the extra checking for absolute accuracy.

The following chart represents the conventional marks used by all American printers, editors, and proofreaders. Study them well. Their purpose is to insure correctness and brevity and to avoid terminological misunderstandings. Use no other marks than these in the reading of any proof which is sent to you for checking.



UNIT SEVEN

SELLING: ATTITUDES AND ACTIVITIES

I. ARE EDITORS PEOPLE?

"IF Robert Louis Stevenson walked in here with the unpublished manuscript of *Treasure Island* under his arm, I don't believe I'd buy it."

The speaker was the editor of a juvenile magazine—one of the most reputable in both business and literary senses of the word, and at that time one of the most thriving publications in the field. Having spoken, he leaned back in his chair with a shrewd glance, possibly to see if he had impressed me. I am free to say he had.

After many years of writing, I have come to consider myself reasonably hard-boiled in the matter of editorial remarks. I used to take them seriously, try to understand them. It took much time, and I regretted every minute spent away from the typewriter. In short, I came to the conclusion that most editorial remarks were probably nonsense and never intended to be anything else; that they were shot out at me, orally or in writing, merely to be courteous—a tactful attempt to speak my idiom. But this one condemning *Treasure Island* made me angry. It was not my work, and thus no courteous implication could have been intended. It seemed, simply, a gratuitous jibe at one of my closest friends.

This man who thought he knew what his readers wanted had thrown out a story that should not only give him an unassailable first place above his competitors, but be forever to his and the magazine's credit a landmark in the history of publication for boys and girls. Could he mean it, I wondered indignantly? If not, what on earth

had induced him to say it? And, if so, how did he mean it, and why?

It was, of course, my business to find out. Especially my business since I, who was not R. L. S., or anybody like him, had just laid on that editor's desk a manuscript which—though there were pirates in it—was not *Treasure Island* or anything one-tenth as good; especially because I couldn't help feeling at least the proximity of something personal in his remark. If I can hold this lordly view of *Treasure Island*, his sharp eyes seemed to say, surely you won't expect me to call out the guard or step a fandango over your neat, pathetic pages.

So, a little wearily, I took up the cudgels; and before I left that editor's office, I think I found out what he meant. But let me, before telling you what I found out, try to explain the editorial cosmos as I viewed it after leaving the Man Who Turned Down Stevenson. I want you to see the editor, not as a monstrosity but as a comprehensible type. We can't find out what editors are actually like unless we forget that we are authors trying to sell them something.

I used to picture the editor in some such way as children are supposed to picture God—a dreadfully austere personage, heavily bearded, fiery-eyed, robed like a judge. He sat at a huge desk in awful stillness, with a checkbook at his left elbow, a mail chute at his right, and a pile of shopworn manuscripts before him; and, if he pulled the checkbook toward him, he frowned and muttered; but if he used the mail chute, it was with a gay flourish and a nasty laugh. . . .

Then I met Arthur Stanwood Pier, at that time editor of *Youth's Companion*. And the dream was swept away

by reality. How eagerly I used to anticipate an occasional word with him, or those deftly penned notes in green ink, gently witty with the words, "Companionable" or "Uncompanionable," and, best of all, "check in due course." But, naturally, he is an author, and he had always the author's point of view. If all editors were like Arthur Pier, this article could not have been written.

But my editorial education went on. With the growth during the last ten years of the personal-contact idea, it became not only advisable but necessary to meet editors and talk with them. And I found myself forced to the conclusion that although editors were more real than in my first vague dream, they were, as a class, hardly more human—that they were, in short, pretty queer specimens. I mean, they habitually said, wrote, and did inexplicable things. They would buy and buy and buy, and then all of a sudden, they would spurn and spurn and spurn. They had me into their offices, into their homes. One would come a thousand miles, preceded only by a telegram "just for a talk." Another would insist on paying my expenses to meet him somewhere on a hurried trip. Of course, I was not so naïve as to imagine that these conferences were arranged for my benefit alone. I usually found a steady stream of writers and illustrators filing through the editorial field-headquarters in some hotel bedroom.

The great chief was always rushed to death, but if I happened to be the one who talked with him while he dined, he dined me royally. Then, with the coffee, he would lean over the table and in a portentous whisper, begin to outline his confidential plans—big plans, far-reaching, epochal. He would explain just where I was to

fit into those plans. And he would lean back with a shrewd glance to see if I was properly impressed. Hope springs eternal. Always I was. I would leave one of those meetings with my head in the clouds—and my next story would be turned down flat.

When, moreover, by some happy twist of fortune a manuscript was accepted, the editorial behavior became even more whimsical. We now enter the Cutting, Piecing, and Basting Department—an important adjunct of any modern magazine. It is said that an author whose story had just been published once stormed the editor's office and accused the brutal fellow of having cut three hundred indispensable words from her piece—only to be told suavely that, not three hundred, but three thousand words had been removed. I think I am not so bad as that. But I have been pained sometimes, and sometimes amused; and at least once utterly baffled—for, though my name appeared as author of the story, the title had been changed, and on the entire first page the only remnant of my work was the name of a ship, misspelled. Nice, I thought, that they liked that.

Sometimes a manuscript is accepted, but with a string attached. "My dear Mr. Blank: We like your story and shall be glad to use it IF—you will rewrite it doing thus and so." Of course, it is exasperating to go back to work on a story which by now, deep in another, you have quite forgotten. But I feel that authors should welcome the opportunity. For my part, I am glad to undertake revision if I can see reason behind the request, and I am weak enough to try it even when I can't. When one is asked to write an April Fools' Day story and then, upon complying, is told that the need for April Fools' Day

stories has passed by; *why* not turn this thing submitted into a Fourth of July story or a Christmas story? . . . well, the facts are incontrovertible, even if one feels slightly ill at the prospect.

But some requests seem illogical. I remember very vividly a story I wrote long ago in which a young girl saved her father's life aboard a wrecked schooner. In order to put the problem strictly up to her, it was necessary to eliminate the crew of four deck hands; so I let a big wave wash them overboard. The story was liked, but the "wholesale slaughter" of the crew was not. Wouldn't I save their lives and then send the manuscript back? Obediently I saved their lives; but, clinging to my idea that, if anybody helped that girl, there would really be no story, I let the wave knock the crew senseless and break a leg or two. Again the story appeared. Better now, but those poor chaps were still pretty badly hurt. Couldn't I have them merely dazed, with sprained ankles and so on? Heaven forgive me! I did it; and a story that originally had been at least plausible was turned into implausible pap. The trouble here was that if the editor felt his readers couldn't look on death, he should have rejected the story in the first place; my story was probably bad, but the deaths of those four men were a vital part of it.

In discouraged moments it is easy to imagine that there was a time when writers could shut themselves into towers of ivory and, looking inward exclusively, write what was in their hearts. At saner moments we know that this was never so. The whole stream of English literature, from Geoffrey Chaucer to Katharine Brush, has been a story of glorious compromise between literary taste and actual pocketbook, between what lay in the writer's heart and

what the reader hoped to find there. The great people have always written, not to please themselves, but to please others. Authorship surely is a public performance no less than is playing the saxophone or walking the tight rope.

I believe that conditions were seldom so salutary to authorship as they are today. But more than ever is it necessary and worth our while to study those readers whom we hope to please—not in order to pander to them, but so that we may, from what we have in our hearts to tell, select those thoughts that will give them the greatest pleasure and profit. But, of course, all this is futile if we disregard their representative. The patron of the arts is, happily, gone; but the editor is here. And unless we consider writing a pastime, success or failure hangs upon our understanding of him.

Let us try to look at him without the checkbook and mail chute.

Several editors of my acquaintance were once, or wanted to be, writers; and I think that this may be true of many. With this fact in mind, their inveterate fondness for fiddling with stories becomes instantly clear. And forgivable. For how often it has happened that some friend has brought a manuscript to us, needing counsel, and we, hearing it, have itched to alter this and omit that—really to rewrite the story. How much greater the temptation would be if, like an editor, we were actually in a position to do it. Then, too, there is always the disturbing possibility that editors know, better than writers, what their readers want.

Another thing. Many editors are former newspaper and advertising men. These two American contributions to civilization, whether or not we are proud of them, have

exerted a very powerful influence on our magazines, on publications in general. It is useless to combat these conditions. A publishing house backed by unlimited capital (by bequest, let us say) could publish and freely distribute magazines and books unrestricted by the great trend, unsullied by advertising and its literary evils; but it is to be doubted whether many people would read these books and magazines. Americans prize, usually, what they pay for; Americans like to read what the Joneses are reading. And I, for one, am committed to the creed: no readers, no writing worth the ink.

The conditions are here. Secretly we may deplore them, but it is another case of compromise or go to work on the railroad. Weeklies, even some monthlies of the better grade, have to a large extent become journalistic. Of course, I don't mean that they publish news exclusively—although an examination of their pages will reveal an astonishingly large proportion of fact material. I do mean that even in many stories there is apparent that hustle and bustle of superficiality, that sentimental or sensational glitter (sometimes called realism) that we have come to associate with newspapers. I do mean that *timeliness* has risen to a place of prime importance.

There is no time to go into such matters as American hurried reading, American devotion to fads, American interest in personalities; but these, I suppose, are the wellsprings of timeliness. A result is that seasonal fiction, particularly in the juvenile field, is urgently in demand. And a man who, for instance, can write even pretty good flying stories at a time when the great reading public begins to take an interest in aviation is a made man. Small wonder that my harassed editor was looking for a

Fourth-of-July story in January; and small wonder that he, in the mad scramble to get out the magazine on time, should have supposed that an April Fools' story was a Halloween story if you changed a word or two and called it that.

As for advertising, that too has left its mark. Advertising must catch the eye, create an illusion and maintain it long enough to sell the product. And editors must convince authors, perhaps by lavish hospitality, by confidential conferences, by high-sounding manifestoes and dramatic, colorful—if sometimes exaggerated—statements that their particular magazine is the only one worth writing for.

For competition among all classes of magazines has become savagely keen in the last decade. Name any periodical trying to cover a market, and one or two others fighting for precisely the same market leap to the mind: *Harper's* and *Forum*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's*, *Time* and *The Digest*, *Boy's Life* and *The American Boy*, *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *The Woman's Home Companion*, to mention only a few. The weak fall or are caught up, and the strong rush on. . . . These editors must be waging a pitched battle all the time. Publicity, plus popular stories, means bigger circulation, and that means higher advertising rates, which permit better publicity and more popular stories—and so on and up. Or, down and out. If your competitor doesn't scalp you, economic depressions will.

In the best of times editors are overworked. Editing a magazine is peculiarly a one-man job; yet so greatly and intricately has it expanded that a superman is really needed. The least task your editor has is that of being

head reader: that is, he must read every word that goes in the magazine and many thousands of words that, in the last test, go out. He does that in his spare time, usually when you and I are sleeping. His main job, of course, consists in making up the "book" in dummy, often three or four months in advance, pacifying his business manager, and owner, locating manuscripts mislaid by illustrators, replying to irate subscribers, boosting circulation by thinking up new publicity, writing and talking to authors, and reading—on the sly—his competitors' to make sure they don't scoop him. And if his authors live all the way from Maine to Arizona (as they do), and his printing plant and business management are separated from his editorial sanctum (as often in these days they are), it is obvious that much of his work must be done while on the move. His decisions, moreover, must be quick, for it's a case of devil take the hindmost.

Now we are ready for the "Man Who Turned Down Stevenson"; we can see him in his setting, and not as a fist hovering between a checkbook and a mail chute. What I drew out of him was, in his own words, this:

"I have found costume stuff to be expensive and risky. It happens that I have just bought a long sea story. Recent correspondence from readers shows a clear leaning not toward the past, but toward the future. And I know a man from whom I can get what I want for less than I'd have to pay Stevenson. In short," he said, and I thought there was a wistful look in his usually hard bright eyes, "in short, availability is everything, today. Few stories are turned down simply because they are badly written (for, in that case, we can patch 'em up), and none are bought simply because they are well written. It's

rough on some people," he concluded, "but, in the long run, it works out. I have to be a trick ahead of the crowd or lose my job. And I think that good writers become better writers through battling problems and filling readers' needs."

You can deplore the situation, but I think you can't deny the logic of the facts.

My plea, then, is for a greater tolerance between editors and writers, a less impersonal and a more human bond of understanding. I feel that it is unwise to play favorites with editors; I know that the best policy is to have enough manuscripts out at all times, so that one or two failures won't much matter. I believe in living, as Cosmo Hamilton once put it, "with an ear to the ground"; but I also believe in forgetting one's writing problems, once in a while, and getting editors to talk about theirs. For, of course, they are up against it, just as we are—struggling, smiling, losing here, winning there.

"A good friend," Kenneth Roberts wrote not so long ago, "is a highly desirable part of every author's equipment—a friend who will listen with patient understanding to the unfolding of a plot; who will point out errors in judgment, errors in taste, mistakes in character building, slips in grammar, weaknesses in plot construction; who will speak reassuringly during the periods of black depression that envelop, with more or less frequency, every writer, causing him to declare bitterly that everything he has written is stupid, futile, banal—is, in a word, tripe; who will somewhat lighten the arduous task of learning to write. Unfortunately for most of us," he added, "such friends are extremely rare."

In this matter I have been fortunate. In my years of

apprenticeship I have had two such friends. I met the first at a time when I felt stumped, with everything to write about and nothing to say—a time when I thought I saw in the near distance that thing we all dread, that great wall across the path, tall, very massive, adorned with huge lettering: THIS IS WHERE YOU STOP! He knocked down that wall with some blithe platitudes about finding a hobby, and stopping work when the whistle blew, and not trying to build Rome in a day. My other friend's genius is still more magical. It consists chiefly in the ability, by the simple act of listening in a particular way and smiling a special sort of smile, to turn doubts into enthusiasms and enthusiasms into words.

One is a man, the other a woman. But, queerly enough, both these people are editors. I mean, both these editors are *people*. And I believe that if we take the trouble to look, most of them are.

—Kenneth Payson Kempton.

II. THE AUTHOR'S SECOND TRADE

ALL writers—and I don't care who—ply two trades. They must produce a manuscript and must sell it. The world is certainly not enriched by the writings of those who give their best time and thought to selling, only to produce the manuscript in their spare time, as it were. But neither is the world enriched by manuscripts that languish unseen in trunks under the bed, never having found their way through the printing press to the public.

So many first-rate authorities have lectured on how to write that I may be forgiven for avoiding this subject altogether and lecturing on how to sell. This takes for granted, of course, that the manuscript is worth selling. It is possible to sell very poor stuff—once! But the producer of very poor stuff, in any branch of manufacturing, is not invited to sell to the same purchaser again. Granted, then, that what we have written or want to write is good and worth publishing, we must next look over the market with a critical eye to find the right place or places in which to sell it. We must adopt the art of the good salesman in every other line.

First, as you will agree, the good salesman is never a bore. He has a great deal of respect for the customer's time, patience, and privacy. The man selling barbed-wire fencing, for instance, does not write passionate personal letters about his aspirations and troubles to his prospect. He shows samples of the barbed wire, and gives his proofs that the factory will be able to supply goods promptly and bill them fairly. Then the sale is made, or is not made—

if some other barbed-wire salesman has previously taken equal or better goods to the same purchaser.

Editors are glorified purchasing agents. If they are already stocked with goods of a certain kind, they are unable to add more of the same goods. An editor who has a Christmas story ready to print is in no position to buy Dickens' *Christmas Carol*, even if Dickens brought it around to the office. It would be "unavailable." Unavailability, due to a well-stocked inventory of manuscripts already bought, is the principal reason for rejection of good manuscripts in any office.

These considerations seem grossly commercial, I know. But they oil the wheels of trade. Nearly all editors are men and women who would vastly prefer to write than to edit. A successful writer, as the late Ray Long once pointed out, has the freest vocation in the world. Armed only with paper, pencils, or typewriter, the writer can go anywhere, live anywhere, and be independent of office hours. If his work is good enough, he can command a much larger income than any editor who ever lived.

Therefore, the editor looks at the writer with more than a touch of envy. The editor would like to create and execute ideas. In his mind, the writer is a violin on which he plays, a flute through which he breathes enchanting music. This applies only to good writers, of course. But not every editor can command the services of those few good writers who have assured markets. The editor is always eager to develop new material and new writers. He takes immense personal satisfaction in their development and their careers.

I speak candidly because half my life has been spent in editing. It was a major thrill when I accepted for the

Harvard *Lampoon* the first drawings of Gluyas Williams, the first writings of John S. Reed. I knew only too well that I could never draw as charmingly as Williams, or write nonsense with the robust genius of Reed. But I got a strong vicarious satisfaction, nevertheless. Reed's stormy career closed soon afterward. He lay in state in the Kremlin. I remembered with pride how I had once printed his limericks. It was pleasant to get out into the byways of Cambridge and force Robert E. Sherwood to contribute something against his will. When I saw Sherwood's *Road to Rome* presented some years ago, the thrill grew stronger. Absurd! But very human. All editors are like that. They are just as human as any of the folks we know at home.

Later, when editing *Harper's Bazaar* and then *Collier's*, I felt the same way. I bought stories, at large prices, from the very best writers I could find. But I ran about with my tongue hanging out in search of new talent. Sometimes it blazed. Miss Hetty Hemingway lived in the same apartment house in which I lived. A day or two after her first story, *Four Days*, had appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, I rushed up to call on her. Already she had a complete collection of letters and telegrams from every editor in the country. But instead of pursuing her career, with every magazine at her feet, she married and has abandoned writing ever since.

A good new writer makes himself or herself felt at once. Mark that! But a good new writer must never forget the principles of salesmanship. More than a few brief candles have snuffed themselves out by being stupid, rude, or indifferent to their editors. A first-rate author—and I don't care who—is always considerate of his editor. The late Arnold Bennett was like something sent by heaven!

He was punctilious, courteous, dependable. Perhaps he had no towering genius. But he delivered his manuscript to you on the day promised. It was the manuscript you expected; not a substitute, or something just as good. It had exactly the right number of words. Bernard Shaw is infinitely more businesslike than any business man I know. He answers, clearly and satisfactorily, by return mail.

Rupert Hughes, who has supported himself very comfortably for a very long time, once sent me a story far too long for the available space. I cut out fifteen hundred words. Later I apologized humbly to him. "I didn't notice," said Hughes. "I'm paid to write 'em, not to read 'em." It took courage to say that. For the story was his masterpiece, *When Crossroads Cross Again*, of which millions of copies have been reprinted. Hughes, a seasoned professional, knew perfectly well that I didn't cut his story for spite but for some definite editorial reason. A majority of authors, I am afraid, never know this.

It is well to remember that every magazine and newspaper is a three-legged stool. It is upheld by the joint work of (1) its editor, (2) its advertising manager, and (3) its circulation manager. The editor has responsibilities to the other two men, just as they have to him. Magazine publishing is very difficult. Interior problems arise concerning which the contributor knows nothing. Many rejections are based on fundamentals of company policy, which are not explained to the would-be contributor.

In the teeth of a rejection, don't weep, don't whine, and don't condemn the guilty editor to the lowest circle of Dante's well-refrigerated hell. The editor may have reasons he can't explain to you, short of an all-day-con-

ference covering policy. And that brings us to the most human editor I have ever known—Henry L. Mencken. Himself a contributor to magazines and newspapers, Mencken was always neat, businesslike, brief, tactful, and reliable. He brought these qualities into his editorial life. "A letter of transmittal from a writer is unnecessary," he once said to me. "When I see a manuscript on my desk, I know why it's there."

Mencken during his years of editing decided that when you see the same manuscript back on your desk, you know why it's there, too. So he did away with that unnecessary agony, the rejection slip. If he pinned anything to the script, it was just a card reading, "With the thanks of *The American Mercury*."

Which is genius.

Every magazine and newspaper that pays anything at all gets thousands more manuscripts a year than it can possibly use. The best way to conduct a mail-order literary business, so far as I know, is to become acquainted with the editor in every possible case, and find out just what he wants. Then deliver in person, if possible. Study the editor. Study the periodical. I know this counsel will be greeted with hoots, or possibly sniffs of derision by persons clever enough to have fired off a manuscript in the mail and to have received a check for it. This has been done.

Selling takes real knowledge of the market. The only easy time to sell is when magazines are growing fatter. The echoes of the depression are not yet dissipated as I write. But watch for signs of increasing avoirdupois among the publications to which you want to sell. And be on their doorsteps in person, with the material they like best.

—HARFORD POWEL, JR.

III. AUTHOR—AGENT—PUBLISHER

EVERY business or profession needs an active channel through which it can move directly to its end and with the greatest possible returns. To the writing profession that channel is usually a good authors' representative who is alert not only to his or her clients' work, but to the highly specialized demands of the market to which that work must eventually go.

The late Elizabeth Marbury, gifted writer and most successful dean of Authors' Agents, said during the height of her career: "The common idea that the business of an authors' agent is merely an automatic function is most erroneous. The agent who is satisfied with only making contracts, collecting fees, and directing his or her office mechanically will never rise above the level of mediocrity. . . . The authors' representative, to be of any real use, must have a mind that supplements what the author lacks."

This is indeed true. And for the beginning writer a conscientious agent is almost indispensable. He will point out defects and limitations, yet, at the same time, encourage and nourish real talent. I say "talent" advisedly, for no agent with vision and love of his profession will take on material or writers in which and in whom he does not himself believe. There is a certain psychological something which makes it easier for an agent to sell that in which he has faith and in which he truly believes. It is a bit of luxury which an agent may be allowed; it is an indulgence which makes business a pleasure.

It is my sincere and firm belief that writers are not made; they are born. That does not mean, however, that many persons cannot *develop* their latent ability under wise guidance. Just as a person with an excellent voice must practice and study to bring out the pure quality which will be recognized in a highly competitive field, so can a writer be trained to develop his (or her) love of creation and direct it toward sound technical paths and desirable subjects. "Stick-to-it-ive-ness" is necessary, for the struggle for recognition is often heartbreaking. But the novice who truly loves the profession in which he wishes to achieve a place never loses anything by constant writing. By so doing he presently acquires a characteristic "style" which in future work will become known as his very own.

Frequently beginners become so discouraged that they are drained of every bit of hope. Out of that discouragement they create an exaggerated belief that they will have a long struggle for any sort of recognition and this in spite of the fact that the work on which they have spent many hours may be of excellent quality. To those who feel so hopeless, I cannot be too emphatic in pointing out the truism that editors are quite as eager to find promising writers as are authors to find sympathetic editors. So, too, any authors' representative, really interested in his profession, is forever on the *qui vive* to discover talented, promising tyro authors. For this reason an able, conscientious, and appreciative representative is of great use to an author. The periods which might be fraught with aimless writing and aimless attempts at marketing are changed into hours of constructive and intelligent criticism. A capable agent knows the commercial markets and

the various requirements of those markets—be it magazine, syndicate, book-publisher, radio, screen, or stage—and he can direct the new writer toward the market he wishes to reach.

It is undeniably true that a good agent is useful in the criticism he may give a manuscript. He sees it objectively as an editor or reader must see it. Often the writer—and this includes even the most successful—is far too close to his story really to see it as he has written it. The plot may be vivid in his mind, his characters may have the breath of life in his own imagination; but many times both of these elements lose vitality on paper. It takes a third person, unprejudiced and versed in the technical angles of writing, to point out the weak spots or the moments of unsound psychology which mar an otherwise splendid piece of work and which, left uncorrected, would make it be unsalable.

I have a strong personal conviction that, if possible, an author should refrain from telling his plots beforehand. He will thus allow his agent to receive the same effect—surprise or "let-down"—that the editor would receive when reading the manuscript. An agent will sometimes ask that a manuscript be written and rewritten, until, by this progressive building of the author's own particular (and, therefore, valuable) style of writing, the story appears to be ready for sale.

Charles Hanson Towne wrote in his *Adventures in Editing:* "Unless a story is as good as an author can make it, what is the use of attempting to place it?" It reaches the editorial desk only to be read by overworked readers, and is summarily rejected because of weak plot, poor characterization, or "under-writing." Moreover, an author

without the guidance of an agent, whose business it is to know, will often have an excellent story rejected simply because it is unsuitable to the demands of the market to which it is sent.

Just as a rubber salesman would not attempt to sell his product to a linen market, so a writer should not try to sell a "pulp" story to a "slick" magazine, and vice versa. Even in the same class of magazines, the individual publications, though appearing similar to the untrained eye, have a very marked difference when it comes to requirements and policy. The authors' representative knows that difference, and will, in most cases, send the manuscript to the right market. To illustrate: I have had writers bring in manuscripts saying that they had read of an opening for that particular type of story in a certain magazine. As a matter of fact, since magazines go to press many weeks before their publication dates, by the time the manuscripts had come in the demand had already been supplied. In this way, as in others, the author is saved much time, energy, and discouragement, for the agent is notified when a given need has been filled and would not, therefore, send further material of the type which had been requested weeks before.

The statement is often made that no established agent will undertake to launch a new writer. This should be taken with the proverbial grain of salt. True, there are far too many would-be authors in the world, but, on the whole, if a person has talent and a real flair for writing, there are few agencies which will not give that beginner attention. Given real ability with which to work, the average agent who knows his job is only too happy to advise and to spend a certain amount of time getting the

novice off on the right foot. *New writers are necessary to replace the ones who pass on, who change their agents, or cease to be productive enough to allow an agent to count upon a definite income from their work.*

Sometimes it is a long, hard pull both for writer and agent, but if there is faith and loyalty (not to mention that sterling quality of gratitude on the author's part) in the combination, then ninety per cent of the time sales are the invariable outcome. This, mind you, is only when a writer shows real ability and a receptive attitude toward what the agent can tell him of market demands, taboos, restrictions, and so on. On the other hand, it is really incredible how many worthless "would-be" authors exist. These "would-be's" often decide to give up a paying job to "become an author"; no more absurd idea was ever conceived.

Writing should be an avocation until one has "arrived." The old idea of writing in a garret on an empty stomach is worn out; no one does genuinely good work in our present harried existence when he is worrying over the rent and food. If a person has it in him to write, he will get it done somehow in off hours. If the *urge* is truly there, the material just *must* be put on paper. In that lies the proof of a real, intended-to-be author.

To go back to the cases of the "would-be's." They call frequently, tell everyone in the office about what they want to write or intend to write, and so spoil for the agent what might, accidentally, have been a good story by telling each "if," "and," and "but." Then, having apparently received a vicarious thrill out of "letting off steam," and having wasted everyone's time, they disappear for a while. Suddenly they turn up again with a new story in mind—the other having receded into the dim past.

By the second or third visit not only the agent, but the agent's secretary as well, has become both wary and weary. The value of hours spent with no results looms large; the welcome cools, and the "would-be's" who never produce go away quite convinced that "agents just won't give new writers a chance."

It is most regrettably true that some editors will not buy a serial for a first-class magazine unless the author has a "name." On the whole, however, editors *will* take good *short* stories by unknowns, and through this medium, the newcomer can rise to the distinction of being a "name" author. Or, if the writer does not do short stories, he will after publishing one or two novels, be considered to have "arrived."

Publishers are most fair about buying unknowns where real merit is concerned, though in book publishing the first one or two novels by a beginner are rarely the ones which make money. A book contract usually calls for an option on the second and third books by the same author. By that time the publisher has an asset in that writer representing the outlay of a considerable sum of money in the way of publicizing and advertising him. Then they can "go-to-town" together. All things being equal, a writer is wise to stay with the same publisher, for a growing friendship and comradeship generally ensues as the years go on. The same applies to the retention of an agent who has expended energy, time, faith, and words of advice by the ream to encourage and help a beginning author.

I feel safe to speak for the smaller agencies when I say that they do spur on new writers when they sense ability in the applicant. Thus the best thing an author can do is to send in material to be read and judged, with a

brief letter stating just what he has done, wants to do, and so forth. The ones with real talent can be pretty sure of attention. In the case of persons living in the city, the agent will request an appointment for a personal interview. The submission of written material is really necessary to save the agent's time and to give both something concrete to talk about.

Even when there is an assured sale and—as in the case of a book or play—a contract, previously arranged by the author, the agent still has a place and a "reason for being." Frequently (generally, in fact), a gifted writer is a poor business man. He should realize that the rights a magazine or a publishing house acquires are extremely important, and there are many loopholes to avoid: some are intentional on the part of the buyer; some are unintentional and can be taken advantage of by the author if he so desires. These things the agent knows and understands—granting, the agent to be one of experience, keen judgment, and integrity. Would a check reading "All rts in Eng lan" mean anything to you? Actually, this is simple compared with some of the abbreviated terms placed on checks which, once endorsed and cashed, take from the author every possible by-product which his story may contain. In this particular instance the line really means, "All rights in the English language."

Assuming an author writes a short story which is really a *good* short story—and I mean by that one that has sound plot, characterization, and action—the following opportunities for sale are open: (1) first American and Canadian magazine rights; (2) rights to publication as a novel upon enlargement; (3) the reprint, syndicate, or second serial rights (all of which are synonymous); (4) foreign rights, as, for instance, English, Scandinavian,

Italian, French, German; (5) leaving out the rare possibility that the story has already been turned into a novel, book rights in the way of inclusion in a collection or anthology; and (6), last and—financially speaking—most important, stage and picture rights.

In citing the foregoing, I can best apply it to a story entitled "The Failure," by Katharine Haviland-Taylor, which my office sold not long ago, and which was printed in *American* magazine. It was purchased by the movies and titled *One Man's Journey*, and while the picture sale was under way, two publishers offered to contract for it if the author would convert the story into a novel. Miss Taylor did not, however, care to work it over.

Where novels are concerned, several of the finest and biggest publishers (and the adjectives are used in the human as well as the professional sense) give an author a contract asking for "first American and Canadian book rights only" and ask no other rights. By way of contrast, there are some publishers who make our contracts calling for a fifty per cent share of the motion picture rights as property of the publisher. Nearly every agent is against this practice both from the standpoint—and the all-important one—of his author's good, and also because the Authors' League constantly protests this giving away of authors' rights. Good agents are well-versed in the legal aspect of contracts, but even they will sometimes slip up despite their vigilance on behalf of their writer.

Nonetheless, an agent is both useful and necessary, and saves even the most successful of authors considerable unnecessary worry. For instance, I have never met the author who did not feel that the rejection of a story (over which he had worked hard and which he deemed salable), was a particularly discouraging announcement if that fact

comes to him while he is creating a new story. He prefers that the bad news go to his agent, who will not tell him about it at the wrong time.

Even for the established writer who knows the markets and has already made the personal contacts which are so important, there is still a great advantage in having an agent. Keeping his fingers not only on the pulse of the public but on the market as well, the agent discovers opportunities which the author might never find alone. A successful author's representative—one who is recognized by editors and publishers—usually knows in advance what type of material may be desired, and he can often arrange assignments for his own clients. By having an active central office in constant contact with the literary fields, he is in a position to do business with both the editor and the writer. Besides the fact that an agent can often secure better prices and more prompt attention for his clients, there is the distinct advantage of having a skilled intermediary in all personal and financial matters between the author and the market. Somerset Maugham once told me that he could dine with his publishers in joy and comfort only because he had an agent who did all the dickering and so made all of the adjustments necessary between them.

Occasionally, of course, authors receive offers from outside sources, but, even then, in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases every author can and will benefit in the long run by letting his agent sift the matter for him and negotiate all terms.

And so, quoting Miss Marbury again, "A *good* authors' representative, one who is really worthy of the name, should be a guide, a philosopher, and a friend."

—GRACE MORSE.

UNIT EIGHT

THE AUTHOR DISCUSSES HIS TRADE

I. LITERARY DISCIPLINE

THE late Edgar Saltus, when engaged in his literary labors, insistently demanded absolute freedom from distraction. The great Italian table of carved wood on which he wrote was secluded in an isolated room at the rear of his apartment, and entrance to this sanctum was strictly forbidden. It is recorded that when one morning while he was at work on *The Imperial Orgy*, his wife burst in upon him to deliver an important message, Mr. Saltus emitted piercing screams, tore out several handfuls of his hair, and battered his head against the walls and furniture. It is likewise recorded that on another occasion he became so infuriated by an interruption that he tore into fragments the MS. on which he was at work and hurled the pieces out the window. As an important postscript to this recital of Mr. Saltus' picturesque touchiness, it should be mentioned that he had a small independent income.

Whenever you come across a writer who can perform his work only when dressed like a Chinese mandarin, or when burning a special brand of incense, or when surrounded by stuffed birds in a soundproof room, you are very likely, if you delve deeply into the records, to discover lurking there "a small independent income." Among serious writers who make a lifework of their craft—as distinguished from those privately wealthy individuals to whom writing is merely an engaging divertisement—you find a preponderance of strictest and sternest disciplinarians. It is hard to see how this could be otherwise,

for professional writing is a laborious career, demanding a rigorous and inflexible routine. The sale of a great many thousand words is required for the earning of a living wage, and I know of no way of producing a great many thousand words annually except by sitting down daily at a desk, with the punctilious regularity of a time-clock puncher, and writing them. No machine has as yet been devised which will relieve the writer of this chore.

There is a common notion among beginning writers that eminence can be achieved by "dashing off a little something" now and then. It is also understood that the dashing-off is accompanied by the wearing of a Windsor tie and the consumption of large amounts of alcohol. I cannot, at the moment, bring to mind any living successful writer who either (a) writes by a spasmodic dashing-off process, or (b) wears a Windsor tie, or (c) drinks more than moderately. There are, to be sure, whole armies of people who call themselves "writers" and who do all three of these things. Most of them will be found in so-called "art colonies," and will be discovered upon close inspection to be either seedy has-beens, or clingers to the ragged edge of the literary fringe, or contributors to those "little" magazines which burgeon and wither overnight and never by any chance make any payment.

Observance of a strict routine and concentration upon producing a wordage-output with the inexorable regularity of a textile mill—these are not badges of the plodding hack but of the most successful writer. Suppose we look at one or two of them. There comes to mind at once John Cowper Powys, the distinguished English novelist and philosopher. John Cowper Powys writes, I suppose, the longest books now being written by anyone. Where

Hervey Allen produced *one* mammoth in *Anthony Adverse*, Powys produces mammoths by the bale. His highly successful *Wolf Solent* required printing in two volumes; the German edition of it required three. *A Glastonbury Romance* contained 1174 pages. Powys composes these gargantuan volumes entirely in longhand; the original holograph manuscript of one of his recent books is almost four feet thick. Under what circumstances are these books written? Does the author isolate himself in a soundproof room? Or retire to a secluded cell and burst into maniacal frenzy if interrupted? John Cowper Powys does all his writing in his living room. During the composition of the latter part of his recently issued *Autobiography* there were always anywhere from three to six people in the same room with him, and these people were carrying on a continuous conversation. Through all this John Cowper Powys continued, imperturbably, his writing, producing a freshly completed page of manuscript regularly every fifteen minutes. That is what is meant by literary discipline, and while not every writer can become as adept at concentration as Powys, it will be found that every successful author has achieved, in greater or less degree, the same knack of imperviousness to exterior conditions.

Do you suppose that even poets—whose compositions, by their brevity, would seem the most likely for "dashing off"—do you suppose that poets are not just as strictly disciplined workers as mill hands? If you doubt that they are, I recommend that you read Berton Braley's autobiography, *Pegasus Pulls a Hack*, and observe a successful versifier's writing methods. In the realm of serious poets, I suggest that you ponder the spectacle of Arthur Davison Ficke, the distinguished lyric poet, laboring for eight

hours at his desk over the revision of an unsatisfactory line.

Literary discipline is divided into two varieties: first, consistent and unremitting production-bulk; and second, cultivation of the ability to concentrate. The importance of production-bulk for beginning writers cannot be overestimated. It is only by a very long and loud and lusty battering that the editorial door can be made to open. An occasional manuscript submitted to the chilly editorial eye is not enough; it makes but a tiny and ephemeral impression when it makes any at all. But the cumulative effect on editors of manuscript after manuscript is likely to be considerable. When the beginning writer receives a rejection from an editor, he should be in a position to send that editor a second manuscript by return mail. And, if the second is rejected, there should be a third. And a fourth and a fifth and a sixth when necessary. Even those writers who have got out of the beginner class and are beginning to enjoy a moderate success are lucky if they can sell one manuscript out of every five. The sole solution lies in *production and more production.* It is sometimes offensive to novices to have their "creative work" talked of in this hard-bitten way, as though marketing manuscripts were like marketing a new kind of tooth-paste. It remains, I fear, an indubitable truth that marketing manuscripts is *exactly* like marketing a new kind of tooth-paste. Manuscripts are merchandise. And when that merchandise is being offered by a new and unknown manufacturer, it can be "put over" only by the expenditure of a huge amount of energy, concentration, and time. It can be made a success, in short, only by a shrewd and zealous practice of literary discipline.

To disparage the importance of "moods" and of "suitable surroundings" and "inspiration" is to court, I know, ferocious resentment by many who aspire to be "literary artists." But I should like to erect, as an advance shield against this resentment, a small and incomplete barrier of facts, among them these: that Anthony Hope habitually worked from ten until four, six days a week, and had no patience with "waiting for moods"; that A. J. Cronin wrote his fabulously successful *Hatter's Castle*, a novel of 250,000 words, in ninety days; that Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, the incomparable author of so many mystery novels, writes 365 days in the year and begins her day's writing at dawn; that Charles Nordhoff (co-famous with James Norman Hall for the *Bounty* tales) does not let the fact that he lives in the soporific South Seas keep him from writing every single day from seven a.m. until noon; that the late Robert W. Chambers, in the first twenty years of his writing career, turned out forty-five volumes, in addition to his magazine work. . . .

There is, I think, no need to amplify this recital. From even the sketchiest perusal of the lives of successful writers, living or dead, it should become clear that their eminence has been achieved by what looks uncommonly like Work. And it should be equally clear that this work is no haphazard sort, but thoroughly planned and routinized, and often as dreary and unpleasant as any other sort of chore. It is, in short, work conducted according to the stringent demands of *literary discipline.*

—Alan Devoe.

II. WHERE IGNORANCE IS BLISS

THERE is an old chantey sung by Harry Lauder, a verse of which runs as follows:

> "Oh, come, my son
> And have some fun
> While you're young and strong and bold."

It was in much this spirit that I undertook my first adventure novel, planning to cut loose from familiar paths and, with my hero, to wander in foreign parts this wide world for to see. Not being bound by either time or space—those awkward limitations which hamper us in our every-day affairs—I was able to choose my destination in quite an off-hand manner. I selected South America as offering a promising field for action, and decided on Colombia rather than Tierra del Fuego, because I preferred the atmosphere of a rugged mountainous setting to the drowsy languor of the tropics. But the point to which I wish to call attention is that my choice was not prompted by the fact that I knew something about the region I intended to explore, but by the fact that *I knew nothing about it.* Nor did I intend to inform myself before starting, partly because I was lazy, and partly because I was indifferent. I was not on a Cook's tour, but on an adventure. Being somewhat hazy in my memory of geography, I did make sure that Colombia was located on the southern continent of America and not in the Malay peninsula, but this was as far as my research extended. The rest I was to leave to my imagination.

To do this was easier twenty-five years ago than it is today. It would have been still easier a hundred and twenty-five years ago. As Lowell envied Chaucer his opportunity to use words "while the dew was still upon them," so all of us must envy those early writers of adventure for the great advantage they enjoyed of living in an uncharted world. Defoe had no difficulty whatever in finding an unknown island. The ocean was all cluttered up with them. Sail a ship in any direction and sooner or later a perfectly good island would heave in sight—a perfectly good island, I say, and not merely a heap of barren rocks. Lovely isles were to be had for the asking—tiny bits of paradise which somehow had got detached from Heaven, blessed fragments of Eden floating in azure waters, landscapes all alive with sparkling streams and gay with red and green parrots. A man could well rest content to be cast away on such as these. An author could well be content to work with such material. Nor need he bother too much about latitude and longitude, for there was no one about who could trip him. If such an island did not actually exist, it might exist for all anyone knew. The writer was safe for a generation at least.

The last of these islands was discovered, so far as I know, by Stevenson, and even he was obliged, in order to gain credence, to resort to the clumsy device of dating his story back. He could not set sail like an honest mariner and take what came. Since his day still cruder methods have been employed. Conan Doyle in one of his stories was driven to the bottom of the ocean in his desperate search for virgin territory—the one region of all others which formerly all self-respecting sailors and their creators sought to avoid.

Consider, also, how much easier—and how much less blameworthy—it was to get shipwrecked in olden times than now. There was a period when, no matter how valiant and skillful the captain, no matter how seaworthy his ship, if he sailed long enough, it was a practical certainty that some spanking gale would tear his canvas to shreds and blow him ashore. Today, with every cove marked, every reef lighted, with soundings recorded even to the farthest Indies, with radio sending information almost minute by minute a captain even if out of sight of land is never out of hearing of land, and so does not stand a chance of losing his ship in the good old-fashioned way.

It is only a question of time when a loss at sea of any kind will be too great an improbability for an author to handle. Just at present airplanes show promise of furnishing a useful substitute, but it is doubtful if this will long continue. Someone is sure to invent a device which will make them as safe as rocking-chairs.

Not only does science conspire to make adventure more difficult at sea, but the same tendency may be noted ashore. What with modern easy methods of travel, it is quite as difficult to find a fresh setting as it is a decent trout brook. There are few trails, even in the deep woods, where one may be sure of not running across an automobile or getting run across by one. Where formerly the traveler stumbled upon bones in his path—reminder of some grim forest struggle—he is now more likely than not to discover the rusty relics of an abandoned Ford. And this is just as true, apparently, of what was once darkest Africa. I saw not long ago a film which pictured a man hunting lions from an automobile. The method was certainly effective,

but somehow it lacked color. Soon the jungle will need its traffic officers.

Some time ago my daughter, then a high school pupil, came home with the request that I secure for her information on how to tour South America—the modern method of teaching geography. I stepped into the office of a tourist agency, and had no sooner mentioned my prospective destination than I was handed enough pamphlets to fill two pockets. On the way back in the subway, I looked over these documents and was amazed at the vivid and exhaustive descriptions they contained, fully illustrated with photographs. It seemed to me that the subject had been treated almost too thoroughly. In fifteen minutes I learned more about South America than I had ever known and quite as much as I ever wanted to know. What incentive, after that, did one have for making the trip?

Even when I wrote the story of which I began to tell you, I could have unearthed information aplenty about Colombia. I might have turned to geographies, histories, consular reports, travel books, illustrated lectures, and to authorities at Harvard. In fact, it was difficult to escape these various sources. To remain ignorant of anything when living in Cambridge, with Boston across the river, requires some effort and a degree of self-control. It was only by avoiding the libraries and keeping my project secret that I managed it at all. Yet I did manage it and thereby revealed a wisdom beyond my years.

For is not a certain amount of ignorance the very heart of romance and adventure? Is it not the unknown rather than the known which excites our imagination and makes

our heart beat faster? Is Youth itself anything more than a blissful condition of lack of knowledge?

Mayhap, then, we can be thankful that it takes so long to educate the young, because in the meanwhile they have the opportunity to do so many foolish things—so many beautifully foolish things, like falling in love, like risking their lives for a lady's glove or a cause, like following some will-o'-the-wisp of a dream, like winging their way across the Atlantic, the chances a thousand to one against them. Ignorance may be not only the better part of romance and adventure, but, for all I know, of wisdom. Sometimes a man may, unhampered by knowledge, rush in where academic angels fear to tread, and find himself face to face with Truth.

Into this first book of which I spoke, I plunged boldly, and for several months had a beautiful time in the mountains of Colombia, imagining just the sort of scenery one would expect to find in the mountains of Colombia. After all, mountains are mountains and trees are trees and blue water is blue water. I exercised some discretion in not being too specific, but I flattered myself that I produced some rather vivid effects. Anyway, I felt fairly safe because the country was a long way off and I never expected to meet a Colombian. As it happened, however, I was fated to encounter an even more difficult sort of person—an American who had served for a number of years as consul of Bogota, the capital city. He began by informing me that he had read the book. I held my breath.

"You must have lived there quite some time," he commented.

"No," I answered.

"Then you have read up on the country."

"No."

"But your descriptions were quite accurate and the atmosphere perfect."

"Thanks," I stammered.

Whether that experience was good for me or not, it left me bolder than ever. Sometime later I rushed, fool-like, into another realm—this time a still more dangerous territory. Under a pseudonym I undertook to narrate the detailed story of an experiment in farming. This was no mere loose-jointed skimming over of facts. I had to be specific; to give the journal of a man who raised hens and turnips and chickens successfully. But the only information I had was what I had picked up from living more or less in the country, reading the daily papers, and applying to this scant knowledge plain horse sense. Again I waited for the deluge. It came but in an unexpected fashion—a request from the associated chambers of commerce of the West for a special edition to be distributed among the farmers of that territory and later a request for another edition to be used as a textbook in the Cornell Agricultural School.

Take another example. I do not know any more about New York City than I have been able to pick up in the course of a few walks from 44th Street to Washington Square. Any other information I may have acquired is of that casual sort which drifts into the mind of everyone. Yet for twenty years I have set stories in this city—sometimes whole novels—and the only time I was ever tripped up in my topography was by a New York bus driver who for twenty-five years had been traveling over the route

in which the error occurred. I did not feel so badly about that, because I don't think it is ever fair to pit an amateur against a professional.

On the other hand, in the only long story I have ventured to set partly in Boston, I was caught in a half-dozen mistakes. The lynx-eyed editor of the *Transcript* made the following comments:

". . . But to the Bostonian *The Web of the Golden Spider* will be more than ordinarily amusing because of its distortions of Boston topography. Possibly it was necessary to his plot that the narrow road that separates the back of Beacon Street houses from the river should be a blind alley, but, as a matter of fact, it is open at each extreme end and is penetrated its entire length by a dozen or more entrances. In journeying from the City Hospital, the nearest route to the Common is scarcely by way of Park Street; a trip from Washington Street across the ferry to one of the East Boston piers is impossible in twenty minutes; and the hero of a novel who can go from Newspaper Row uptown to one of the smaller hotels and thence uptown to the Post Office, is certainly capable of accomplishing greater miracles than falls to the lot of Mr. Bartlett's hero. But an even greater feat than this is his, for as he stands on the steps of the Public Library, he sees opposite him the spires of Trinity Church. And there are certainly Public Gardens in Boston, but that is not the name by which they are generally known."

These errors were inexcusable, but they were so obvious that I do not understand even now why the reviewer took the trouble to point them out. There was nothing for me to do after such an indictment but to plead guilty and throw myself upon the mercy of the court. And never

since have I dared to set a story in Boston. I feel much more at ease in Timbuctoo, where I know I am out of reach of the *Transcript* critic's eyes.

"A little knowledge is a dangerous thing," sang Pope. True, undoubtedly, for geographers, critics, and manufacturers of high explosives. But for the writer of romantic fiction, who in this day of realism is not supposed to amount to much anyhow, it may prove a blessed thing.

Here's wishing foul weather, dirty winds, and a glorious wreck for the next young fool who weighs anchor, sets sail, and casts off on the sea of adventure; but he'll be darned lucky if he isn't rescued, before he gets out of the harbor, by some well-meaning realist supplied with maps, charts, and guidebooks.

—Frederick Orin Bartlett.

III. HOW I WRITE SEA STORIES

HOW does a man go about writing a sea story? To tell how I came to write my first two sea stories may be my best answer to that.

Seventy sail of Gloucestermen were cruising for mackerel off the easterly end of the Maine coast. Word came of great rafts of mackerel schooling off Cape Cod; whereupon the entire fleet swung away to the westward.

In those days of all-sail vessels, no two Gloucestermen ever sailed the same course together without a trial of speed resulting. Imagine seventy of them swinging off together before the fine fresh breeze! It was a roaring regatta—drive, drive, drive her, boy! through one hundred miles of blue water to the Cape Cod shore.

We met with a flurry of mackerel off Cape Cod; but we also met with a gale of wind and a high running sea; whereupon the fleet held another regatta, this time a hard beat against the wind and sea to Provincetown. The gale was nothing to worry about, but, the sea being too rough for fish to show why not lie comfortably in the harbor until the breeze o'wind blows by, said the fleet.

There was a day and night in harbor; and after such an experience, the talk of the crew was, of course, of able vessels and hard-driving skippers. We put out to sea again with our crew still talking.

One night I was walking the deck with one of the watch, John McKinnon. Suddenly John stopped dead, shook a clenched first, and shouted:

"I'll bust her spars,"
Said Chester Marrs,
"But I'll beat the Boundin' Billow!"

And right then and there my first sea story was born.

To go back a few years: I came of a seafaring ancestry, and I was brought up in a seafaring neighborhood in South Boston. One of my early recollections is of my father and my uncle or some neighbor coming home from a sea trip and telling of their experiences.

These men took hardship and peril as nothing to get excited about; but let some of them get started on the beauty and seaworthiness of some favorite vessel and they would go lyrical. I must have absorbed what they had to say of vessels, because at seven years of age while on a summer bank fishing trip with my uncle, one of the regular amusements of the crew was to get me to pass judgment on the fast and slow vessels of the fleet.

I grew up, left home, knocked about the world, striving always to be making trips somewhere to see strange people and strange places. While it was always in the back of my head that some day I would be writing for a living, I did not make these trips to write about. I went to places because I wanted to go to them. I did feel impelled at times to write of my experiences; and sometimes I did so from no inner compulsion—I needed the money. Most of this writing was done for Boston newspapers at space rates.

One September day I went to Gloucester, though not, as some reviewers have had it, with the idea of writing up the fishermen. I went there as director of the Gloucester Athletic Club; also to play football on the Athletic Club eleven, a semiprofessional team.

I stayed in Gloucester that fall and winter. My job offered me plenty of leisure to loaf along the waterfront, in the offices of vessel owners and outfitters, in the

fo'c's'les and cabins of fishing vessels. I came to know many fishermen, both skippers and hands. I met famous captains, great sail carriers, and fish killers. I came to know them intimately, to sail with several of them afterwards.

One winter gave me my fill of leading gymnasium classes. I chucked my Gloucester job in the spring. Two months later I went to Paris. I had been to Europe before this—once as a saloon passenger on an ocean liner and once as a hand on a cattleboat. This time I went steerage and came back steerage, and in those days steerage was *steerage*, not "tourist."

After my return from Europe, I stuck around home for a few weeks. During this time I wrote two boys' stories for the *Youth's Companion*. I wrote them to repay money I had borrowed from friends in Europe to keep me going in Paris. I had done two stories for the *Companion* before going to Europe. They paid me fifty dollars each for them, and I thought it pretty soft—getting fifty dollars for something a fellow could write between breakfast and lunch of a morning. It certainly beat free-lancing for the newspaper at five to eight dollars a column.

Early that fall I went to Gloucester and made the seining cruise of which I have spoken. I made that cruise primarily for my own enjoyment; and yet I think now that I was by this time nursing the notion of writing about it some day. Knocking about among all sorts and conditions of men had served to make it clear to me that the fishermen of my boyhood days and the Gloucestermen of my previous winter were great fellows.

To return to the deck of the *Monarch* and John McKin-

non on that October night. That "bust her spars" outburst of John's was like a self-starter to my memory. A dozen sea adventures I had listened to, various experiences of my own, tales that had been anchored down in my subconsciousness since my boyhood days at home—these now broke free of their deep moorings and came bobbing up for recognition. When John went below after his watch, I stayed on deck.

I knew nothing of Chester Marrs or the *Bounding Billow*, except what John's three lines of verse had told me; but I did not have to know. My imagination had been aflame for a week with tales of the same sort of man he must have been. As for his vessel, I had only to recall a dozen or twenty able vessels as they came driving into Provincetown Harbor from the gale to envision a proper vessel for such a spar-buster. Before I went below I was singing to myself lines of a little song to fit into John McKinnon's climax.

After returning home from that seining cruise, I did not at once turn to and try to write stories about it. I did write a two-and-a-half column article for the Boston *Transcript* of the night drive of our vessel to Provincetown in the gale of wind. It was two months later before I thought of writing any fiction around our Gloucestermen.

One Christmas week, being out of cash, I began to wonder if I could write a story for the big magazines. I had talked a few times before clubs and frequently to groups of friends of my Gloucester experiences. A friend, a pretty good judge of writing, came to me one day, saying: "Why don't you work some of your Gloucester experiences into fiction? Here's a sea story here." He held up a

magazine of large circulation, with a well-known author's name attached. "You can talk a better sea story than that. Write as you talk."

So on this cold December day, I sat down to write my first sea story. My family lived in an old-fashioned house on the slope of Dorchester Heights in South Boston. It was a cold morning on the hill. No fire had been started in the living-room or dining-room heaters; so into the kitchen I went to keep myself warm. My mother rolled piecrust on one end of the kitchen table, and I wrote my first sea story on the other end.

I wrote that story in longhand, and to this day I write my first drafts of stories in longhand. I wrote it as fast as I could drive a pen over the paper. It was begun after breakfast and finished by lunch time. That first draft ran from 4,000 to 4,500 words. I sent it to a friend to be typed, a friend who could read my most hurried penmanship and who never pushed me for payment.

That story is told by a fisherman to other fishermen in the fo'c'sle of a Gloucester vessel on a night in harbor after a gale of wind. Here and there the storyteller breaks into song. When I started that story, I had no thought of a song in it, but as the storyteller got warmed up, the occasion and the company demanded song, so he just naturally "busted" into song; and there was I, without ever intending it, writing stanzas of a fisherman's song that had never been sung or written by anybody, including myself, in all the world before. The song rolled off the end of my pen as the storyteller had need of it, beginning with:

When she swings her main boom over
And she feels the wind abaft,
The way she'll walk to Gloucester 'll
Make a steamer look a raft.

For she's the Lucy Foster,
She's a seiner out o' Gloucester,
She's an able, handsome lady,
And she's going home.

The title of that story was "A Chase Overnight."

Next morning I sat in the kitchen again and wrote another story, this one being about Chester Marrs and the *Bounding Billow*, the one I should have done first, perhaps. I titled it "Reykjavik to Gloucester." (Fishermen pronounce it Rik-kie-vik.)

Before beginning that second story, I wrote out the song that had taken shape in my mind after John McKinnon went off watch that night off Cape Cod. Here is the song:

'Twas sou' sou'west
Then west sou'west
From Rik-kie-vik to Gloucester:
'Twas strainin' sails
And buried rails
Aboard the Lucy Foster.

Her planks did creak
From post to peak,
Her topm'sts bent like willow!
"I'll bust her spars,"
Said Wesley Marrs,
"But I'll beat the Boundin' Billow!"

I named the vessel "Lucy Foster" to rhyme with Gloucester, and I changed the name Chester to Wesley because the final "s" in spars was a perfect echo to the hard "s" in Wesley—"assonance," an old rhetoric teacher of

mine would have said: Doubtless he would also have said that Rik-kie-vik to Gloucester connoted more romance than a drive from the fishing banks to Gloucester.

After writing the song, which my mother said I sang to myself as I wrote it down, to finish my story there was only the intellectual pick-and-shovel work of actual writing and rapid filling-in of the song's outline.

The first draft of that second story ran about 3,500 to 4,000 words, and that, too, was finished by lunch-time. I went over both stories when they came back to me typed—smoothing out and filling in (mostly filling in)—one going over fattened them up, one to 6,000 words, the other to 5,000 words or so. (My short stories always fatten up in the going over. Some are enlarged twice their original length, even when at first thought the original length seems final.) I had the two stories typed over, altered or added another dozen or twenty words, and they were ready for the editor. In later days I went over my stories more than once.

In those early days I wrote my first draft of every short story in a single sitting. I still think it is the best way, if a man has the abounding vitality to storm all the way through; but that calls for youth. Nowadays, it has to be a good day, a specially good day, when I even attempt it.

Those first two stories were sent to *Scribner's*, with a stamped and self-addressed envelope for their return. In ten days or so I got a letter from Mr. Burlingame, the editor. He enclosed a check to pay for both stories, asked me if I had ever written anything else, and would I come in to see him when next I was in New York. I wrote scores of stories and articles for *Scribner's* afterwards.

It is interesting, to myself, at least, to note how, in

writing those two first stories, I brought myself clear up-to-date in the telling of one, and went back to myself as a little boy in the other. In one I was living over again some recent thrilling experiences; in the other I was the little boy on the waterfront watching out for the brave vessels coming in from sea. That story closes with little Johnnie Duncan looking out to sea for vessels, all the while singing to himself:

"I'll bust her spars,"
Says Wesley Marrs.
"But I'll beat the Boundin' Billow!"

Our early days have a lot to do with shaping our minds, don't they?

—JAMES B. CONNOLLY.

IV. WHY YOU CAN'T WRITE DOG STORIES

HE WAS the editor of a national magazine. I was lunching with him and we had been talking over a series of six dog yarns he wanted me to write for him. Suddenly he broke in on the tranquil flow of our speech by saying with some heat:

"I'm sorry, sometimes, you ever started this fad of writing dog stories!"

"Why?" I asked, my heart and stomach beginning to slump. "Is the public getting tired of them?"

"No," he made answer. "The dog story is eternal. The dog is as much a 'human emotion' as love or hate or treasure-seeking or getting back at the boss. But since you began writing them, our office has had perhaps a couple of thousand to send back. They were written by two sharply divided classes of people: those who knew how to write, but didn't know dogs; and those who may have known dogs, but most assuredly didn't know how to write. It's a pest."

He was mistaken in saying I had "started the fad of writing dog stories."

Better dog stories than ever I could write were published long before I struck the rich vein. Several of Jack London's books, for instance (*The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, and the tales of Jerry and his brother); Brown's *Rab and His Friends;* and—best of the lot—Ollivant's *Bob, Son of Battle.*

All these antedated my entrance into the field. So did

that appealing tract, *Beautiful Joe*. But those books, perhaps from their inimitable excellence, found almost no imitators. The field lay practically fallow for years. Also, editors and publishers had learned to believe that the public was no longer interested in that form of tale. This, despite the throngs that milled their way through dog shows, and although dogs were bought and sold on a scale and at prices never before known.

Always, I had longed to write dog stories. I had made an intensive study of The Dog from my babyhood. I believed I knew him as well as the average human being could hope to. But whenever I asked an editor if he didn't want a dog story, he treated the proposition as though I had asked leave to write in fiction form the Love Life of the Isopod. I was busy. I had no time nor desire to write stuff which must be one hundred per cent unsalable. So I waited—meantime studying dogs in every possible normal phase.

It was the late Ray Long, then editor of the Chicago chromatic trio of magazines—the *Red Book*, the *Blue Book*, and the *Green Book*,—who started me writing them. He was a constant visitor to Sunnybank, my home; and he loved our great old collie, Lad. On one of his visits when I chanced to tell him of an exploit of the great dog's, he asked me to put the yarn into magazine fiction form.

That was the beginning. Almost as soon as the first Lad story appeared in the *Red Book*, other editors were writing to me for dog stories. They have kept me at it ever since. The book publishers were harder to convince. But the success of my first dog book, *Lad: A Dog* (which long ago passed its sixtieth edition), soon brought them into line. I seem condemned to that brand of work until the public shall sicken of it.

I have not told the foregoing steps to my canine-fiction career with any idea that they can be vitally interesting on their own account, but merely to explain the birth of a fad. Presumably, other writers figured that if such mediocre tales as mine could get past, anybody could get a dog story accepted, for the flood set in. I am told it is steadily increasing. Dog stories, by the score, avalanche into editorial offices. The bulk of them avalanche back again.

The reason why almost nobody lands a really successful dog yarn in magazine or in book is sized up by the verdict of the editor whom I quoted at the outset of this piece. The many men and fairly many women who have bothered to make a life study of dogs have not made a life study of story-writing. The really good writers who have undertaken to write dog stories have a woefully slight knowledge of dogs. And nearly always when a man writes of something he does not understand in full, his story fails to convince or hold his reader. For example:

A woman who has won fame as a fiction writer told me she had written two dog stories and that both of them had been rejected by at least a dozen magazines. She asked me to read them. Naturally, I refused. (I made a fixed rule, long ago, never to read an unpublished manuscript. There is dynamite in that kind of thing. I don't care to be haled to court, years later, on a plagiarism charge. Most professional writers have had to make that same wise rule.) But she told me the theme of each of the tales. This, at my request, in the presence of several other writers.

One of the tales was of a Scottish terrier puppy whose ten-year-old master fell into the river and was drowning;

the valiant Scottie plunged into the swirling current and towed him ashore. As part reward for this deed of heroism, the dog received for dinner that night a heaping plateful of chicken bones. There was more to the story, but this was enough for me.

"Did you ever own a Scottie?" I asked the talented author. "Or did you ever have actual information of one of them towing a drowning boy to shore in a flooded river? No? Well, the Standard agreed on officially by the Scottish Terrier Club of America sets a Scottie's average weight at from sixteen to twenty pounds. We may assume that a boy of ten would weigh somewhere around one hundred pounds. Call it eighty pounds, to be conservative. Thus you have a tiny dog dragging a weight from four to five times as great as his own through the waters of a raging river and depositing that weight safely on the bank-side turf.

"A Newfoundland, ranging from 110 to 150 pounds and trained by heredity to water-work, could do it. But never a Scottie. As to the heaping plate of chicken bones, any semi-novice dog-fancier will tell you that you might almost as well have given him a plate of arsenic. Cooked poultry bones are murderously dangerous to dogs. I don't think we need go further into the reason why your story came back to you so often."

Her second tale dealt with a loyal St. Bernard which outstripped a fast express train in a five-mile life-and-death run. (No track-trained greyhound can travel for even a quarter-mile at the pace of a full-speed express train. And a greyhound can run circles around a St. Bernard for any distance at all.)

In brief, she had invented certain situations which were

starkly and fantastically impossible. The editors who rejected the stories need not have been dog experts to know that both tales rang jarringly false.

If one should write a golf yarn with the hero encompassing the eighteen holes in twenty-two, or about a tennis hero who swatted the ball so far that his opponent forfeited the match by being unable to find it, or of a horse which leaped upon a luckily-waiting motorcycle to win the Derby, a merry howl of derision would arise from every magazine office to which the thing should be sent. Yet, the two dog yarns whose plots I have cited were every bit as ridiculous. And their creator, a professional author of note, did not bother to verify her statements before she scribbled them.

Nor was hers the only or the most flagrant case that has been shoved upon my reluctant notice. Richard Harding Davis's *Bar Sinister* contains even more gross misstatements. He makes a mongrel cur win against a champion at Madison Square Garden under an internationally famous judge. He also makes the same cur recognize his mother—and recognize her *as* his mother—after a lapse of years. The cur does other ghastly impossible stunts that no dog could or would or should do.

But the story got by through its sheer fictional merit. Davis wrote it with his tongue in his cheek; and wrote it frankly as a fairy tale. Davis was a breeder. He knew dogs. He knew his *Bar Sinister* hero was no dog at all, but a four-legged d'Artagnan. He got past with that story because he knew better. If he had been as ignorant as he pretended to be, the yarn would have been atrociously unsalable.

Another published dog story by an illustrious novelist was a flat failure. It told of a canine hero's defense against

twelve "eighty-pound Airedales" and his easy escape from them after they had got him down. The Standard sets forty-five pounds as the maximum for an Airedale. An eighty-pound Airedale would be almost as much of a freak as a forty-pound cat. Moreover, if twelve forty-five pound Airedales should down any creature short of a rhinoceros, the victim would never rise again in this world, and would be reassembled with much difficulty on Resurrection Day. The story, as I said, did not score a hit. The author knew nothing of his theme's technique. And, subconsciously, his readers knew he did not, so they slighted his product.

To get down to rules: in order to write a salable dog story, the author must have studied dogs closely—particularly the breed whereof he is writing—for many years; and must have profited by his study. To no human is it given to know all—or even fifty per cent—of dog nature. But he must know all that can be learned, and he must apply that knowledge. In none of the instances I have just touched on (except that of Davis) did the writers take the remotest pains to check up on their statements. Their dogs were not living dogs but brain-built puppets. The reader and the editor may not know why they don't like such fakes, but they don't like them.

I have never made one of my fictional dogs do something which I have not positively known some real-life dog to do. I have spent tedious days and weeks and have referred to several hundred pages of my own notes, more than once, to establish as a proven fact a single action of one of my story dogs.

I don't mention this as a brag. There is little enough in it to brag about. But I *do* claim it is the only way whereby I or anyone else can write an acceptable dog story. Of

course, structure and development and story-telling technique are as essential in this as in any other form of fiction building. But none of them will suffice without that basic knowledge. There can be guesswork in the saga of a man and a maid. But there can be no guesswork in the actions and ratiocinations of a fictional dog. These must be starkly true to canine nature.

The ghastliest failure in dog-story writing is to have the dog tell the yarn in the first person. Thereby, you are giving your dog human thought, methods, and human aspirations. Your verisimilitude goes to smash; and, with it, ninety-nine times in a hundred, the success of your tale. Kipling did this in *Thy Servant A Dog;* and he made an amusing story of it (though why he had his canine hero express himself in baby-talk is more than my poor brain can fathom). He got away with it because he had genius and story-telling knack, and because he knew terriers. Davis did the same in *The Bar Sinister.* I have known of few other exceptions to the vast rule of failure when this medium was used. Steer wide of it. Your dog does not think or behave as you do. When your story makes him do so, he ceases to be a dog, and the tale ceases to be a dog story. Almost invariably it ceases to be vendible or readable.

In practically all dog stories there must be human characters as well as dogs. In the genuine dog story the human interest must be subservient to the canine. Otherwise, you have merely a human story with a dog interest; a wholly different thing from the rightly-written dog story. You cannot have two heroes in a story, one a human being and one a dog of equal importance. One must be subservient.

I have never written a dog story for children. Yet I am told half the readers of my dog yarns are under seventeen. I am also told, flatteringly, that I am the only dog-story writer read to any extent by young folks. This puzzles me. For never have I written "down" to children. In my dog yarns I use language I would not use in talking to a child. In spite of this, the under-seventeens read them and come back for more. I think their interest is in the dogs, rather than in the narratives. Blessed and thrice lucky is he who can command such an audience! I am as grateful for it as I am perplexed.

Two men, now in the fiction game, can beat me by a mile at dog-story writing, if only they choose to. They are John Taintor Foote and Kirk. Luckily for me, both of them merely scraped the top of this golden vein and then turned to other lines of fiction. *Dumbbell of Brookfield* and *The Monarch and the Gas-House Pup* are as far beyond my scope as a dog exponent as Shakespeare's sonnets excel the doggerel verses wherewith I preface my book, *Buff: A Collie.*

The field lies waiting. Many have striven to invade it. Some day there will arise a man or woman who not only knows dogs, but who can write fiction.

The greatest dog story of all could well have been written by the village idiot who found the supposedly lost-forever horse that had strayed into the woods. This paragon figured out where he himself would hide if he were a straying horse. Then he went to that spot. And he discovered the missing horse. A man with that uncanny knowledge of animal nature would make a sublime dog-story writer. But, alas, he was only the village idiot! So, presumably, he was not a fiction writer. Or was he?

—Albert Payson Terhune.

V. DOING THE ADVENTURE STORY

THE adventure story is probably easier to write than any other kind of yarn. The action to be followed by the narrative is already there, or there would be no idea in the first place. The most difficult part is getting the background—*it has to be authentic.* The majority of adventure stories are read by adventurers themselves—men living in the far places of the world, with no motion-picture houses, no bars, no friendly homes to welcome them—nothing to take their minds off their solitude and their loneliness except the reading of stories of men like themselves. The pulp magazines which specialize in that sort of material have a far-flung circulation. *Adventure,* for instance, is (or was) the only magazine in English to be had in Spanish Morocco. And, in Manchuria, a friend of mine, who was prospecting for oil there, once told me that each month they used to borrow "a pound of pulp" from their local supply merchant who himself selected the magazines that went into the pound. The bright author who happens to write some burning tale of Cossack and Tartar must bear in mind that Cossacks and Tartars are likely to read it—English being a much more universal language than we who speak it realize—and write violent letters to the editors if they find mistakes in the story. For some curious reason adventurers are much more prone to write in to magazines than are other kinds of men. Perhaps they have more time on their hands.

With this little exordium, let us move at once to the demonstration table. From this point on I am going to

have to use the pronoun *I* a lot, but, after all, I wrote the story, and it is my thoughts that are wanted in this brief script, else the editor would have asked someone else to write it.

So then, once upon a time I wrote a story of adventure called *Hunger*. At that particular period I had been living in Chicago writing poetry—for nothing—for the *Chicago Tribune*. And among the poems I wrote was one about the sea, I being interested therein. The poem appeared in due course, and one day shortly after, as I was riding down in an elevator from an upper story in some office building, the elevator-man informed me he had read the poem.

"I 'been to sea," said he, "years ago when I was a young feller. I was shipwrecked, too. Ship burned up. I made two thousand miles in an open boat!"

What ho! Here was a story. If this man had been on a ship that burned, that was part of a yarn. If he had made two thousand miles in an open boat, that was *all* of one. That very day, when he was off duty, I happened to be near by, and, meeting him quite by chance (as he thought), I suggested that we pause and refresh ourselves after the day's labor; and when the refreshing was over, I had his yarn. Of course, he didn't know it at the time. Had I stepped up to him and said, "That's a wonderful story. Tell me all about it, and I'll write it up and sell it to some magazine!" he would have ducked like a rabbit into some nearby hole. Either he would have been so self-conscious that he would have been unable to remember anything that had happened to him, or else he would have tried to write the story for me, embroidering it himself in places where he thought it needed it.

Now, then, this was a synthetic plot for several good reasons. In the first place, I had never been on a ship that caught on fire, and, next, I had never spent more than an hour in an open boat, and that not in mid-ocean. But—and this is important—I had been thirsty. I had also been hungry. And, therefore, I knew what it felt like to be on short rations—to be able to eat just enough to sustain life. And I knew what it felt like to lie unprotected all day under a tropical sun and to shiver all night in spray-wet clothes. The knowledge of these sensations at first-hand is a requisite of all would-be adventure-story writers. Such sensations can also be used for color, but they must be properly described, for the adventurers who read have experienced them and know what they are, and will accordingly demand an accurate picture. It was Captain John Smith who said, "Wayfaring men must expect to go hungry, in strange places of the world, whither their unrest leads them."

Well, I started the outline of the yarn, knowing, in general, the course of its action. Next, I had to decide who the principal actor was going to be, and how the action of the story would affect him. Of all this ghostly ship's company who would be the man I could be closest to? As a matter of fact, I did not know any of them very well; so I decided the simplest thing to do would be to attach myself to that ship, put myself in all the situations of the narrative, and note how I would react to them. It would sound authentic, because the hero would be me, and God knows, I knew what I would do if I saw a hatch cover go sailing up from a hot air explosion, while I felt the planks begin to sizzle under my feet. Now, then, who for a friend to talk to? My elevator-man! Who for a villain? Well, I'd

make my boss at the office the captain of the ship. I could draw a very convincing picture of a loud-mouthed, bullying, roaring—but very competent—man in his own field, and make him a sailor instead of a branch-office manager.

And so the ship set sail. I knew what happened first: she was a hungry ship. What would I do in a case like that? Well, the hero of the yarn consulted with his watchmate (the elevator-man), and they went aft and complained to the skipper, who chucked them out bodily after a long flow of scathing bitterness where the expression "sell insurance" (my occupation at the time) was changed to, "do a sailor's work for a sailor's wage."

I had a lot of fun writing that yarn, and let me say that a story that is not fun to write might just as well not be written, because it won't be fun to read either. I had fun, I say, writing that yarn. And then one day, shortly after, I was called into my office—all the way from Oak Park—and given complete hell, including a spare set of grids and a gross of pitchforks, because of some minor infraction of Home Office Rule 205. That night—by then my dream ship had burned, and the crew had taken to the boats—the skipper was thrown to the sharks; my hero had leaped up, banged him over the head with an oar, and overboard with him! Good for the hero!

The story sold and presently it appeared in print. It turned out to be a long one—a novelette. I had had to fill in a lot of gaps, sometimes by accounts of the food; sometimes by accounts of the progress of the ship; sometimes by writing a page or two about setting and taking in sail. Such details I used to check with the elevator-man, and again with another deep-water, square-rigged sailing-man I knew. Then came a day when I got a fan letter from a

reader. He was a captain of some transatlantic greyhound, but he had done his time in sail, and had been around Cape Stiff fifteen times—out and back. My two sailors were right as far as they went, but the man who wrote that letter to me had been a ship's officer, and he knew better.

Said he, "That was a nice story you wrote about a ship burning up. But it would have been better if you had left the sails alone. You had a squall come up to port with a ship running with the wind on the starboard quarter. You had the crew stand by the braces, which any ass would know enough to do, but you didn't say anything about filling the head yards, shivering the after yards, putting the helm hard a-port, brailing in the mizzen, and letting the ship go off before the wind. All these dumb authors do the same thing. They hear a catch phrase, and stick it in their story, and haven't even got sense enough to know what train of events they may have started. My advice to you and to them is not to try to write sailing-ship stories after a long contemplation of some painting of the *Constitution.*"

Well, how could it be said more neatly than that?

—Leonard H. Nason.

VI. WRITING THE WESTERN STORY

MUCH as the swift-moving Western story offends the ultra-cultured tastes of the intelligentsia, it has made for itself a very definite place in American literature. It may not be "art," as the literati consider art. It may lack the polish of urban tales or the heart-throbs of bucolic stories. But it has something of which neither of these can boast. It has action; action to the *nth* degree! And it is typically American. Its popularity with the reading public is evidenced by the fact that today it is one of the very few types of adventure stories to which entire magazines are devoted.

Critics of the "Western" are legion. Because of its swift action and original diction, they concede it to be nothing better than the progeny of the Diamond Dick and Nick Carter yarns. Yet the Western is no more the offspring of the Diamond-Dick thriller than our tales of the sea are kin to the old "paperbacks" that once luridly detailed the harrowing exploits of the buccaneers.

Tainted, then, as the Western is by the Diamond-Dick thrillers, critics years ago predicted its summary demise. Yet the Western today is riding "high, wide, an' handsome," and new magazines are appearing almost monthly in its name.

The chief objection to the Western, it seems, is its speed of action, which precludes all chance of "letting down." This was made clear to me recently when I submitted a Western novelette to a well-known "book-paper" magazine. In rejecting it, the editor wrote: "Your canvas is too

crowded. While I realize that there are many industrious writers who make a living writing this fast moving, vivid type of story, it fails utterly to touch the gold with us."

A matter of policy, perhaps! At least, a problem that every writer of Western fiction faces constantly. His yarns are too breath-taking, critics say. Are they, or does the stigma of the Diamond-Dick thriller still cling to the "Western"?

Westerns must, of necessity, be fast-moving, for the life of the West was that way. The cowboy was a man of few words but great action. He lived in the saddle and was always on the move. The problem he faced was weather—terrible, death-dealing winters and blistering, rainless summers. The things he fought for were the two essentials of life—food and water. The men he was pitted against were, in many cases, fugitive desperadoes who bowed to no law save that which the cowboy "toted" on his hip. Small wonder then that the tales of the "puncher," who was up with the break of dawn and away, never to stop moving until long after dark, are filled to the brim with action!

If this be the age of speed, then the Western truly belongs. For in it there is no attempt at slow, monotonous characterization. Characterization is supplied by action. If there be description, it is short and vivid, as the cowboy saw it.

Much has been said concerning the improbability of Western stories. As a writer of Western fiction for ten years, I have never based one of my stories on anything but fact. Nor do I believe that other Western writers are fictionists in the sense of fabricating impossible situations.

Somewhere in the wildest, swiftest-moving Western will be found an element of truth.

All cowboys were not hard-shooting, hard-drinking renegades, as many Westerns picture them. That is admittedly true. But, on the other hand, the cowboy was no angel. He was a victim of environment. Working as he did on the silent trails, miles from the crude civilization of the plains, his only companions dumb brutes, when finally he did get among men, he did what the sailor does, what the soldier does, what any red-blooded human being does—he unleashed his pent-up passions and "cut loose." And limited as were his recreations, he naturally took advantage of the few offered.

Westerns have been maligned for their alleged evil influence on hero-worshiping youth. If this be true, then writers of every kind of adventure story are guilty on the same score. But of all the rest, Westerns are singled out as the target for critical shafts, because they still carry the taint of the Diamond-Dick thrillers.

There have been, indisputably, many great Western stories. Of these, Wister's *The Virginian* is probably the greatest. We have all thrilled to the lazy drawl of the Virginian. He was of the West, an example of what the Westerner should be, the critics claim. Yet, strange as it may seem, that same Virginian and his soft speech are to blame for most of the crimes committed in the name of Western fiction today. That Virginian has all but succeeded in corrupting the language of the West—"as she is writ," as Mark Twain might have said.

As is true with every other class of stories, there are writers of Westerns whose knowledge of the great prairie

has been obtained from that area lying east of the Alleghanies. These writers have taken the Virginian—who, it must be remembered, was a Virginian and not a Westerner—and put his slurred "r's" and soft drawl into the mouths of their cowboys. The result is a jargon of deliberately misspelled words under the guise of dialect, and no more resembling the vernacular of the West than many of the gaudily-dressed and swaggering cowboys they would have folk believe infested the range. Many of the heroes of Westerns today would have been hanged forthwith had they ever dared to show up in a real cow camp.

The Westerner was once an Easterner. Many of the "wagon bosses" on the roundups wore fraternity pins on their horsehide vests and had diplomas from large universities tucked away in their "warbags." Eventually they came to drop their final "g's." Soon they included in their vocabulary a few of the cowboy's original words, which in many cases he coined to express something briefly, rather than be bothered with discussing it at length. But the cowboy talked like a human being fifty years ago, and, strangely, still does today. Simply because the Virginian, first great hero of Western fiction, said "yuh" and "suh" is certainly no sign that real Westerners should continue to say the same thing indefinitely in stories.

The cowboy has put several words into the language that will endure. He was, first of all, a man who expressed himself swiftly and tersely. To this end he dropped many words of common usage and coined others to express his thoughts. He was essentially a coiner of phrases—short, powerful, and descriptive.

I have often wondered if the criticis of Westerns

know anything of the West? When they complain of the vernacular, of the breathlessness of these yarns that never "let down," do they realize that the cowboy himself never "lets down"? That, when men of other sections were in the prime of life, the cowboy was so badly "stove up" as to be no longer classed as a "top hand"? The life of a cowboy was truly fast and furious, as the Western story paints it.

Few readers realize the rigid demands imposed upon a writer of Western fiction. First of all, to be true to life, the story must be fast-moving. It must have, of course, the vital elements of suspense and mystery. To produce a salable script, the writer of Westerns must incorporate the requisites of other short stories and stretch his imagination back forty years for a setting, for editors will not admit that the West of the old trail-herd days is dead. This is not required of the writer of rural stories, of urban yarns, of other types of adventure yarns. They have their locale, the same now in most respects as it was a half century ago.

But the trail herds have vanished. What few cowboys are left wear mail-order clothes. The "bronc-peelers" long since have quit the "home ranch" for the rodeo game, leaving the writer stranded high and dry for a background for his fast-moving Westerns, which, undeniably, have created a new field of fiction—a type of story that, above all else, is typically American, and which in its typically American way defies all precedent, smashes all the rules of good writing, and utterly ignores the example set by the masters of another age!

—Francis W. Hilton.

UNIT NINE

BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE AUTHOR'S PROFESSIONAL PERIODICALS

THE following publications are intended primarily for all types of writers. They include in their monthly or quarterly tables of contents materials of informative and inspirational quality aimed toward the practical interests of authors who wish to write to sell or who merely enjoy the many intangible satisfactions of creative work. In these magazines will be found instructional articles on all forms of writing, encouraging essays for the beginner, autobiographical sketches by arrived authors, fugitive verse, and—more important, perhaps, than anything else—constantly revised, and therefore up-to-date, lists of markets, prize contests, and news from the field. The market lists cover at least once during the year all important magazines and their editorial needs, all major syndicates and book publishers, all significant special markets such as greeting-card concerns, foundations, and so on, along with the manuscript requirements of the stage, movies, and radio.

THE WRITER, 8 Arlington Street, Boston, Massachusetts. *A monthly*

THE WRITER'S MONTHLY, Springfield, Massachusetts. *A monthly*

THE WRITER'S DIGEST, Cincinnati, Ohio. *A monthly*

THE AUTHOR'S LEAGUE BULLETIN, New York City, New York. *A quarterly*

THE AUTHOR AND JOURNALIST, Champa Street, Denver, Col. *A monthly*

I. BOOKS FOR STUDY

The Short Story

BEACH, STEWART, *Short Story Technique*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1929

BEMENT, DOUGLAS, *Weaving the Short Story*, Long and Smith, New York, 1931

FREDERICK, J. T., *Handbook of Short Story Writing*, F. S. Crofts & Co., New York, 1932

GALLISHAW, JOHN, *The Only Two Ways To Write a Story*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1928

HOKE, T. and BEACH, S., *The Short Story Builder*, F. S. Crofts & Co., New York

MIRRIELEES, EDITH R., *Writing the Short Story*, Doubleday Doran & Co., Garden City, Long Island, 1929

ORVIS, MARY B., *Short Story Writing*, Ronald Press Company, New York, 1929

PITKIN, WALTER B., *How To Write Stories*, Harcourt Brace & Co., New York

WILLIAMS, BLANCHE COLTON, *Handbook on Story Writing*, Dodd Mead & Co., New York, 1930

The Novelette

NETHERCOT, ARTHUR H., *A Book of Long Stories*, Macmillan Company, New York

WILLIAMS, WILLIAM CARLOS, *The Novelette and Other Prose*, Bruce Humphries, Inc., Boston, 1921–1931

The Novel

AMES, VAN METER, *Aesthetics of the Novel*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1928

BEACH, JOSEPH W., *Twentieth Century Novel*, Century Company, New York, 1932

BUCHAN, JOHN, *The Novel and the Fairy Tale*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1931

COOK, ELIZABETH C., *Reading the Novel*, Little Brown & Co., Boston

D'Orsay, Laurence R., *Writing Novels To Sell*, Writer's Digest Publishing Co., Cincinnati, 1930

Grabo, Carl H., *Technique of the Novel*, Charles Scribners' Sons, New York, 1928

Hogarth, Basil, *The Technique of Novel Writing*, John Lane, The Bodley Head Ltd., London, 1934

James, Henry, *The Art of the Novel*, Charles Scribners' Sons, New York, 1934

Michaud, Régis, *The American Novel Today*, Little Brown & Co., Boston, 1928

Muir, E., *Structure of the Novel*, Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, 1929

Wolfe, Thomas, *The Story of the Novel*, Charles Scribners' Sons, New York, 1936

The Play

Hogarth, Basil, *How To Write Plays*, Pitman Publishing Corp., New York, 1933

Krows, Arthur E., *Playwriting for Profit*, Longmans Green & Co., New York, 1928

Lawson, John H., *Theory and Technique of Playwriting*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1936

Merrill, J. and Fleming, M., *Play-making and Plays*, Macmillan Company, New York, 1930

Nicoll, A., *The Theory of the Drama*, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., New York, 1931

The Scenario

Esenwein, J. B. and Leeds, A., *Writing the Photoplay*, Writers' Library, Home Correspondence School, Springfield, Massachusetts

Fawcett, L., *Writing for the Films*, Pitman Publishing Corp., New York, 1932

Hignatio, V., *Scenario Writing as a Career*, Commercial Book Co., Lahore, India, 1933

Jackson, Arrar, *Writing for the Screen*, A. & C. Black, Ltd., London, 1929

ORTMAN, M. G., *Fiction and the Screen*, Marshall Jones Company, Boston

PATTERSON, FRANCES T., *Scenario and Screen*, Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, 1928

The Radio Script

DIXON, PETER, *Radio Writing*, Century Company, New York, 1931

FIRTH, I. E. and ERSKINE, G., *The Gateway to Radio*, Macaulay Company, New York, 1934

HULBURT, CLAUDE, *Learn To Write for Broadcasting*, Search Publishing Co., London, 1932

SEYMOUR, K. and MARTIN, J. T. W., *How To Write for Radio*, Longmans Green & Co., New York, 1931

All Fiction

HOFFMAN, A. S., *The Writing of Fiction*, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1934

LUBBOCK, PERCY, *The Craft of Fiction*, Harrison Smith & Robert Haas, New York, 1921

MARKS, PERCY, *The Craft of Writing*, Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, 1932

MARRIOTT, JAMES W., *The Art and Craft of Writing*, Harrap & Co., Ltd., London, 1933

UZZELL, THOMAS H., *Narrative Technique*, Harcourt Brace & Co., New York

General Authorship

BRANDE, DOROTHEA, *Becoming a Writer*, Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, 1934

CANBY, HENRY SEIDEL, *Better Writing*, Harcourt Brace & Co., New York

JEPSON, R. W., *The Writer's Craft*, E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1930

KIES, PAUL, and OTHERS, *Writer's Manual and Workbook*, F. S. Crofts & Co., New York, 1933

PASCHALL, ALMA, *Creative Expression*, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1933

SMITH, B. W. and LINCOLN, V. C., *The Writing Art*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1931

II. BOOKS FOR READING

BATES, S. C. (ed.), *Twentieth Century Short Stories*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1933

BENJAMIN, L. S. and HARGREAVES, R. (eds.), *Great English Short Stories*, Halcyon House, New York, 1936

BERDAN, JOHN M. (ed.), *Fourteen Stories From One Plot*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1932

BREWSTER, DOROTHY (ed.), *Book of Modern Short Stories*, Macmillan Company, New York, 1928

CLARK, B. H. and LIEBER, M. (comps.), *Great Short Stories of the World*, Robert M. McBride & Co., New York, 1925

COURNOS, J. (ed.), *American Short Stories of the Nineteenth Century*, E. P. Dutton & Co., New York

EATON, RICHARD (ed.), *Best Continental Short Stories of 1927*, Dodd Mead & Co., New York, 1928

EATON, RICHARD (ed.), *Best European Short Stories of 1928*, Dodd Mead & Co., New York, 1929

FOTHERGILL, JOHN (comp.), *Mr. Fothergill's Plot*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1931

HOUSTON, KENNETH (ed.), *American Short Short Story*, Galleon Press, New York, 1933

JESSUP, ALEXANDER (ed.), *Representative Modern Short Stories*, Macmillan Company, New York, 1929

KNICKERBOCKER, EDWIN V. (ed.), *Notable Short Stories of Today*, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1929

LIEBER, M. and WILLIAMS, B. C. (eds.), *Great Stories of All Nations*, Tudor Publishing Co., New York

LONG, RAY (comp.), *Twenty Best Short Stories in Ray Long's Twenty Years As an Editor*, Long and Smith, New York, 1932

MIRRIELEES, EDITH R., (ed.), *Significant Contemporary Stories*, Doubleday Doran & Co., Garden City, Long Island, 1929

O'BRIEN, E. J. H. (ed.), *Best Short Stories*, Various yearly editions of both American and British stories, Dodd Mead & Co., New York

OVERTON, GRANT M. (ed.), *Great Modern Short Stories*, Modern Library, New York, 1930

OVERTON, GRANT M. (ed.), *World's Fifty Best Short Novels*, Funk & Wagnalls Co., New York, 1929

RASCOE, B. and CONKLIN G. (eds.), *Smart Set Anthology*, Halcyon House, New York, 1937

RHYS, E. and SCOTT, C. A. (eds.), *Twenty-six Adventure Stories Old and New*, D. Appleton Co., New York, 1929

SCHWEIKERT, HARRY C. (ed.), *Short Stories*, enlarged edition, Harcourt Brace & Co., 1934

WARREN, DALE, *A Modern Galaxy*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1930

III. BOOKS FOR REFERENCE

Dictionary of Modern English Usage, Henry W. Fowler, Oxford University Press, New York

Dictionary of Similes, Frank J. Wilstack, Little Brown & Co., Boston

Handbook of Good English, Woolley, D. C. Heath & Co., Boston

Putnam's Word Book, Louis A. Flemming, Blue Ribbon Books, Inc., New York

Roget's Thesaurus of English Words, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., New York

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, G. & C. Merriam Company, Springfield, Massachusetts

Winston Simplified Dictionary, John C. Winston Company, Philadelphia

UNIT TEN

THE CONTRIBUTORS

THE CONTRIBUTORS

FREDERICK ORIN BARTLETT (Where Ignorance Is Bliss, page 276) was educated both abroad and at Harvard, and before adopting authorship as a career, did newspaper work with the *Boston Record* and the *Boston Herald*. His first book, *Mistress Dorothy*, appeared in 1901, and was followed by many more, including *Joan of the Alley*, *The Web of the Golden Spider*, *The Seventh Noon*, *The Lady of the Lane*, *The Guardian*, *Whippen*, *The Wall Street Girl*, *The Triflers*, *The Red Geranium*, and others. He has contributed short stories and articles to numerous magazines and newspapers, and has written some material anonymously and under pseudonyms.

ELIZABETH COATSWORTH [Mrs. Henry Beston] (On Writing for Children, page 130), poet and fiction writer, became one of the most famous contemporary children's authors in the United States upon the publication of her *The Cat Who Went to Heaven* which promptly won the Newbery Medal in 1930. Author of a dozen books of prose and verse, she contributes regularly to the "quality magazines," lectures on literary subjects, and takes an active part in the community affairs of Hingham, Massachusetts, her winter home.

JAMES B. CONNOLLY (How I Write Sea Stories, page 284), one-time clerk and surveyor, one-time soldier and sailor, winner of the first Olympic championship of modern times, has lived an even more adventurous life than do the characters he paints in his fiction. Called by President Theodore Roosevelt, "the greatest sea-story writer of them all," James Connolly, after nearly forty years of yarn spinning, still turns out exciting, salty tales for the big circulation magazines. Among the score of books he has done, the outstanding are: *Out of Gloucester*,

The Seiners, *Open Water*, *The Trawler*, and *Book of the Gloucester Fishermen*.

ALAN DEVOE (Literary Discipline, page 271), says that the best explanation of his interests and of the tinge and flavor of his writing can be condensed into the one word, "bookman." He was a bookseller until 1932, at which time he gave up the selling of other authors' efforts to market his own. To *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Scribner's*, *The American Mercury*, *Esquire*, and other periodicals he has contributed much non-fiction on the various aspects of books and literature. He is currently connected as a reviewer of books-about-books with the editorial staffs of several periodicals.

CLAYTON HOLT ERNST (The Juvenile Field as a Training Ground, page 123), president and editor-in-chief of The Open Road Publishing Company, has made *The Open Road for Boys* magazine one of the largest and most popular juvenile publications in the United States. Once an editor of the old *Youth's Companion*, he has followed the fiction fortunes of boys for more than a quarter century. He is the author of many articles and short stories for youngsters, and has turned out a half dozen fiction and non-fiction books which sell year in and year out to boys and girls all over the world.

DORIS F. HALMAN (If You Must Write for the Movies, page 217), studied under Professor Baker in his famous 47-Workshop after her graduation from Radcliffe in 1916. Some time later she came to New York as a reader for the American Play Company. Early in 1929 she joined the editorial staff of the Fox Film Company, and after two years as a reader, became assistant editor. Meanwhile she had turned out two books: *Set the Stage for Eight*, a collection of original plays, and a novel called *Honk!* In 1932 she became assistant to the editor of RKO, and at the end of three years took charge of the company's play

department where she has been ever since. She has taught playwriting at the Bread Loaf School of English, Middlebury College, and has contributed much to various magazines and newspapers.

FRANCIS W. HILTON (Writing the Western Story, page 305), who lives in Houlton, Oregon, knows both the old and the new West. For years a popular writer for Western "pulps," he turns out both short and long fiction with equal facility. His stories carry the stamp of authenticity, and are particularly marked by their sharp characterizations, their color, and swift action. Among the novels he has done are *Hell-crazy Range* and *Phantom Rustlers*.

KENNETH PAYSON KEMPTON (Are Editors People? page 243), after being graduated from Harvard in 1912, returned to take his master's degree and to teach English there. In 1917 he joined the Navy for the duration of the war. Two years later he came back to Harvard, and has been an instructor in English and tutor at the University (and Radcliffe) ever since. Not long after rejoining the Harvard faculty, he began to do numerous adventure and sport stories for the juvenile magazines. Shortly the first of his juvenile books appeared. They now include *Phantom Gold*, *Red Eagle Island*, *Loot of the Flying Dragon*, and many others. His first adult novel, *Old Man Greenlaw*, was published in February, 1936; and he began immediately preparing the next, *The Road to Meeting*. He has contributed to various adult magazines, among them *The American Mercury*, *Blue Book Adventure*, and *Holland's*.

GRACE MORSE (Author—Agent—Publisher, page 259), literary representative, is a graduate of the American Academy of Art, and has been both a stage and screen actress. Her professional experience includes stock and road work with the May Robeson Company. With this background Miss Morse was offered a

place with the American Play Company as assistant to Charles Hanson Towne. Upon his leaving to become editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, she succeeded to his post as literary manager. Not long after that Miss Morse was approached by the famous Elisabeth Marbury to join her in a partnership. This resulted in their establishing what became one of New York's leading literary agencies—Elisabeth Marbury and Grace Morse. After Miss Marbury's death, Miss Morse set up and continues to conduct her own agency. She has represented and sold the works of some of the most famous authors in America and in Europe and is, therefore, well qualified to discuss the problems of marketing.

LEONARD H. NASON (Doing the Adventure Story, page 300), because of his swank and élan as an undergraduate at Norwich University, acquired the nickname "Steamer." After steaming through the World War, insurance adjusting, and writing for the "pulps," he suddenly achieved an international reputation with a best-selling first novel, *Chevrons*. He followed this with other successful books of adventure and war romance, among them, *Sergeant Eadie*, *Once a Corporal*, *The Man in the White Slicker*, *Defenders of the Bridge*, *Three Lights from a Match*, and *Among the Trumpets*. The high standards of interest set by these publications he has for many a year maintained consistently in his stories in *The Saturday Evening Post* and other magazines.

HARFORD (W. H.) POWEL, JR. (The Author's Second Trade, page 254), joined the staff of *Vogue* the same year of his graduation from Harvard—1909. Five years later he moved to the International Magazine Company, and in 1917 became the editor of *Harper's Bazaar*. Shortly after the World War, in which he participated as a captain in the Air Service, he took charge of *Collier's* magazine as editor; then in the same capacity he headed the famous old *Youth's Companion*. For the last half-dozen years he has conducted a highly successful advertis-

ing business in New York City, and continues, as he has in the past, to turn out popular fiction and non-fiction books, along with articles for various magazines. Among the numerous books he has written are: *Walter Camp*, *What About Advertising?* (with K. M. Goode), *The Glory of Peggy Harrison* (with R. G. Carter), *The Virgin Queene*, *Married Money*, *The Invincible Jew*, *Oh Glory!*, and many others.

KATHARINE SEYMOUR (The Radio Script, page 177), Barnard (A.B.), 1923, taught French and Latin in high school before she joined the staff of WEAF as one of the station's first two continuity writers. During this period she originated and developed many forms of radio copy and drama, and also wrote the first radio series which combined a narrator, music, and dialogue: "Tales of Schéhérazade." When the National Broadcasting Company was formed in 1927, she became assistant continuity editor of that concern, and continued in this position until her resignation from the company in 1935 to become assistant to Major Bowes. After giving auditions to five hundred amateurs a week for six months, she resigned to rest and presently to free-lance. During this recent period she has written a novel and a number of magazine articles and radio scripts. Despite the fact that all her preparation and work has in the past been in the field of radio, her ambition is to establish herself instead as a fiction writer. Her book, *How to Write for Radio*, from which "The Radio Script" was taken, was done in collaboration with J. T. W. Martin. It is recognized by N.B.C. as the only authoritative textbook to date on radio writing. J. T. W. (JOHN TILDEN WAITE) MARTIN, Miss Seymour's co-author, was born in New York City in 1898, and received his bachelor's degree from Hamilton College twenty-two years later. After broadcasting experience in Chicago and New York, he joined N.B.C. in 1926 as special feature writer, first in the publicity and then in the continuity department. In 1928 he joined the radio department of George Batten Company which, merging with Barton, Durstine, and Osborn, resulted in the current

firm, Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn. In these positions he has originated, written, cast and directed many series of radio programs, including "The Cabin Door," "Johnson and Johnson Musical Melodramas," "The Hamilton Watchman." He has also had a hand in writing and directing many others, including "The Cavalcade of America," "The March of Time," and other famous radio hours.

ALICE HOWARD SPAULDING (The Play Script, page 207), born in Maine, was educated in the public schools of Alabama and Massachusetts. Graduating with honors from Tufts College, she turned from music—in which she had intended to specialize—to English teaching. After teaching at Edgartown and Fitchburg, Massachusetts, she received an appointment to the Brookline public schools where she has been ever since and is now Director of English. Early in her teaching she began to write and has contributed both fiction and non-fiction to such magazines as *Harper's*, *Scribner's*, *American*, and so on. Her most recent book, done in collaboration, *Behind the Footlights*, is a text on play production. Miss Spaulding was one of the founders of the famous 47-Workshop of George Pierce Baker at Harvard and of the Drama and Play-producing Studio of the Bread Loaf School of English of Middlebury College.

ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE (Why You Can't Write Dog Stories, page 292), once traveled on horseback through Syria and Egypt investigating leper settlements and living among the Bedouins of the desert. Out of this experience came his first book, *Syria from the Saddle*, which appeared two years after he joined the staff of the New York *Evening World*. He experimented with various types of writing, and, in addition to a number of short stories and a novel (with his mother), did the libretto of a comic opera, *Nero*, in collaboration with William C. DeMille. It was not until 1919 that his first dog book, *Lad: A Dog*, was published. The success of that tale established him as an animal-story writer, and yearly thereafter he brought out a new

dog book and in the popular magazines many briefer yarns about dogs and other animals. He has done more than thirty plays for motion pictures and innumerable articles and poems for current publications.

EDWARD WEEKS (Editing the Manuscript, page 232), studied mechanical engineering at Cornell, but the subject proved beyond his depth, and rather than "bust out," he volunteered, in his nineteenth year, as an American ambulance driver with the French army. He was decorated with the Croix de Guerre in the summer of 1918. During his war experiences he wrote back to this country a number of letters which were finally brought to the attention of the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Encouraged by him, Mr. Weeks, when the war was over, transferred to Harvard University, and after his graduation, entered Trinity College, Cambridge, England. In the summer of 1924 he took a job as salesman and editorial apprentice with the firm of Boni and Liveright. In 1925 he became assistant editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, and in 1928 was made editor-in-chief of the Atlantic Monthly Press, where he is at present engaged. He has contributed widely to magazines, and is the author of a recent book called *This Trade of Writing*.

TRENTWELL MASON WHITE is the author of a number of fiction and non-fiction books, including *The Thing in the Road*, *Muffled Wings*, *Three Rookies at Morton*, *Opportunity Ahead!* (with C. H. Ernst), *Writers of Colonial New England* (with P. W. Lehmann), and *Famous Leaders of Industry* (Series III). Besides his books, he has done many short stories, novelettes, and articles for American and Canadian magazines. He is at present staff editor of *West* magazine, *Education* magazine, and Educational Guides, Inc. He lectures on creative writing for the State Department of Education of Massachusetts, formerly instructor in Creative Writing at the Bread Loaf School of English, Middlebury College, and is President of the Curry School of Expression, Boston.

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

138 722

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY